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Life and Death Boundaries Transgression in Contemporary Japanese Media

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Abstract

The theme of Life and Death Boundary Transgression has appeared recurrently in Japanese discourses since the writing of the *Kojiki* (711-712). The theme, which deals with journeys to the land of the dead, resurrections and overall an unacceptance of death has been approached in various forms, media and context. In the Second Lost Decade (2000-2010) the theme appeared for the first time as a main structural tension in new popular culture media such as manga, anime and computer games. This PhD studies that representation of an ancient and recurrent theme through new media forms, understood as media that engage for first time the EBT conversation as their main dramatic tension. In so doing it focuses on a double meditation on the role of the theme in Japanese culture, the role of the media that support its discursive manifestation and both theme and media relation to the context. The theme of life and death boundary transgression, what I frame as Essential Boundary Transgression (EBT) is therefore understood as a dynamic human construct. It deals with and interrogates human ontologies while, simultaneously, questioning the context from where it manifests.

Lay Summary

Transgression is the process of challenging a rule, a boundary and a category. It, also, allows for a full experiencing of the same laws it aims to deconstruct. The question, however, is then which boundaries are acceptable to be transgressed, and how. This thesis addresses such questions within the debate on life and death connections and limits in contemporary Japan. To do so it focuses on new forms of discourse through popular culture media. The thesis addresses these questions through three texts from different media: the manga *Fullmetal Alchemist,* the animation film *Journey to Agartha* and the computer game *Shadow of the Colossus.* All these examples were designed during what is called the Second Lost Decade in Japan (2000-2010). In that landscape, the lingering crisis developed further challenges to the economic, social and cultural narratives and categories once mainstream in Japan. After a decade of rapid change and shifting boundaries these new texts interrogate the ruling categories. Some of them follow the logic of melting everything into air while others aim to find an existential bedrock from which to construct a new narrative on how to exist. In that climate, the theme of Life and Death Boundary Transgressions comes as an abstract narrativization of that project.

However, as abstract and disconnected from social reality as the theme of Life and Death Boundaries might seem, this thesis aims to present its relation to contextually situated debates that relate and complicate it. Therefore, by analyzing the content and construction through visual media texts of the theme this thesis studies the relation to mainstream debates in Japanese society about individualism and communalism. The individual and their role within the group take shape within debates that aim to comprehend the working of the cosmos and how this enforces particular ethical and moral systems of 21st century Japan.

Declaration of Originality

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any precious application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented herein is entirely my own

Signed…… Date……

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Life and death connections have had a perennial presence in narrative discourses and rites in Japan. That recurrence has sustained a common understanding of Japan as a country in which the interest in death and the processes it generates and stimulates occupies a paramount ontological and epistemological position. Nevertheless, death's centrality, at least, originates from the inaccessible nature of the phenomenon itself, allowing and requiring speculative exploration in narrative forms. Such dynamics have produced a longstanding conversation regarding the possible consequences of death and its connections to life. Most specifically, the debates resulting from these hermeneutical ventures into the unknown have taken shape as a recurrent theme: the transgression of the boundaries between life and death, what I call Essential Boundaries Transgression (EBT). Throughout its history, different voices have joined these debates, enquiring into the unknown in an attempt to make death interpretable and therefore understandable. Until recently these recurrent examinations have taken the form of mythological manuscripts, oral folktales and novels. Now the theme has been transferred to new communicative media.

It is the aim of this project to understand how the EBT has developed in contemporary Japan. This approach enables study

of the shape this ancient debate has taken in such timeframe by engaging both the forms of these cultural manifestations and their content. The aim is twofold. First, to understand the intertextual connections between context and text. That is, to explore the influence of the Second Lost Decade (2000-2010) on the EBT conversation. Second, to focus on the construction and transmission of these new participations through new media forms not available before.

The EBT Conversation and its medial construction is elaborating on anthropological approach, that is, an understanding of the theme as manifestation of public and communitarian negotiations on the meaning of being. In this process of discursive conversations the EBT is situated in a larger ontological and existential interrogation about humanity and our place within the world. This PhD situates the sample within a larger intertextual tradition of questioning the meaning of being and the ethical and moral consequences of that process. These engagements with the EBT are thus seen as part of an ongoing individual and collective construction. Consequently, the EBT and the texts that engage in this conversation are studied and understood within a greater net of creation and negotiation of meaning, norms and ontologies. Since the EBT speaks about and to existential interrogations of the human condition, I argue the study of contemporary engagements will benefit from understanding

them as part of the cultural and social construction of reality, as texts that create meaning and make sense of the world around them. Moreover, as I discuss, the EBT is, and should be understood as, a dynamic construction, a vehicle for new contextually situated worries and hopes of its context to be shared and discussed. Being this the first exploration on the theme in Contemporary Japanese media I frame the EBT as such, a human construct key to understanding the negotiation of boundaries, the clashes of discourses and, overall, an ontological and existential enquiry on 21st century Japan.

This PhD's anthropological approach continues a well-established understanding of communication as collective negotiations of cultural landscapes (Jackson, 2008: 664). It considers communication at the very core of the anthropological project as it overlaps with culture as human phenomena, connected and constitutive of social practices. Communication is, therefore, the complete range of the mediated information (including experiences, ethical and moral questionings and cultural meditations) within a community (Slater and Tacchi, 2004; Horst and Miller; 2006). Culture is what is learned, shared through interactions; and communication is the transmission of that information through mediating sharing devices.

Moreover, late anthropological studies help this project to understand the role of media as it presents an extension of the

human, a continuation of our ontological and existential processes. It is through the possibilities of mediated communication that the 'human' expands over its own corporeal limitations. There, with the aid of the medium as an extra-corporeal projection, the human can meditate about and beyond her/his own body and its relation to mediated images (MacDougall, 2006). These media are, as Fischer argues (2003), new social prostheses that expand our ability to create, think and engage with our cultural meditations.

The anthropological approach to mass mediation and the engagement of different visual media allows a focus on the formation of the subject and the cultural transmission of that process (Jackson, 2009: 665). It also allows a de-essentialisation of the text, the themes and media used. They are understood as a human construct, as something made by agents from and directed to an intertextual conversation. The texts are then open to wider contexts, demanding profound and robust contextualization, what in return offers a better understanding of the intertextuality of these engagements, on what they are saying about and to their contexts, their cultural and political responses to, in this case, the EBT conversation.

But what is then this EBT theme and its relevance as a theoretical and hermeneutical framework? The EBT, simply put refers to narratives that deal with journeying to the netherworld. This

journey might be physical, an attempt to resurrect a deceased individual or an abstract manifestaction of the uneccptance of death. This theme slightly resembles the Greek concept of *kathabasis.* However, *kathabasis* refers to every descending movement which makes it, for this PhD, too imprecise. The EBT accounts for the meaning and the polysemic connotations I aim to discuss. The use of boundary instead of limit refers to the permeability and the possibilities such word expresses. The boundaries of life and death are, in these narratives, transgressed, crossed and made fluid.

Boundary comes from the difference between the Kantian idea of limit or boundary and Plato's. For the latter, the world is a cosmos for which any search for knowledge starts by recognizing its order and harmony. Kant, however, perhaps because of the context in which he lived, looked for knowledge as an attempt to order a chaos, fixing human thought. Another departure point between Greeks and Kantian conceptions of boundary is that the latter understood limit as purely negative, mainly concerning the idea of limitation, not availability or restriction, ignoring the possibilities and qualities of limitation and boundary common in Plato's philosophy. Looking for a positive meaning of limiting Kant took the step of matter-of-factly taking for granted the conceptualisation that "limiting" is a purely mental concern without any reality (Szakolczai 2015: 13). Thereby limit will itself

have no reality. The third step of Kantian logic was to define the positive meaning of limit as boundary, that, contrasted to limit, determines what it bounds and then, through the act of excluding a boundary determines, encloses a completeness and unity (ibid).

The second concept, transgression, refers to the act of transgressing, to go beyond the limits or bounds set by commandment, law or convention; in other words, it is “to violate or infringe” (Jenks, 2003: 2). However, it also announces the law or convention that it is transgressing, being a deeply reflexive act of both denial and affirmation. It is the conduct that breaks the rules or exceeds the boundaries are culturally and socially established. As a challenge to the system, transgression not only questions categories such as “normal” or “pathological” but also the institutions that have raised and defended those (Foucault, 1981). However, it is important to note that while transgression is the exceeding of boundaries, human experience is the constant involvement with limits, being constrained, an always recurrent experience in our action (Jenks, 2003: 7). Every limit entails the very desire to be transgressed, expressed from ancient mythologies to contemporary narratives and by festivities and attitudes such as periodical carnival experiences (Bakhtin, 1968: 11).

Transgression derives from a particular order of thinking in cultural discourse, an argument derived from thinkers whose

inspiration comes from the debate between Hegelian and Nietzschean philosophies (Jenks, 2013: 20). The former, envisions an inevitable historical process of the spirit (being) being elided and reason (knowing in the systematic coherent humankind progress). On the other hand, Nietzsche prioritised ontology over epistemology through his theory of the “will to power” as he relativized epistemology. Such a move has greatly influenced post-structuralist and postmodernist theories elevating the impact of individual cognition as well as questioning all claims of truth in a movement, which Jenks believes opened the gate of transgression (ibid).

Transgression is also a social process transcending boundaries and/or exceeding limits. Some authors have argued, however, that transgression is bound to human condition and experience as we have knowledge of our limitations, and of the absolute finitude of death which constrains (Suleiman, 1990: 75). For him transgression is also an “inner experience” both individual or collective. In such acts the bounds of rational, quotidian behaviour are surpassed becoming an experience that keeps the rules it is violating in mind. Suleiman goes even further arguing that, to fully realize any prohibition is necessarily a transgressive act, a thought that ultimately affects the concept of boundary and experience (ibid). As such, transgressing essential boundaries would bring with us the ontological and existential impulse to

question, challenge those primordial categories. It is the aim of this PhD to understand how that has been done in contemporary Japan, the forms it has taken and the effect of the media that support and transmit these new engagements.

To do so I start by acknowledging the theme within its context, since its origin to the shifts which have shaped its attributes in the last decades. Therefore, this chapter addresses how the religious beliefs of Japan shaped the EBT debate historically. These ontological interrogations have, however, varied deeply in the late modern secularized scenario in which literature and the fantastic have joined and opened the conversation to new and more plural voices. In such a fragmented narrative scenario popular media showed an intense participation producing a considerably large amount of engagements in EBT debates. It is intense for the number of examples participating in the conversation as well as for the relevance they have to the theme and the discussions they open with regard to it.

Thus, this chapter presents an overview of Japanese approaches to death, afterlife and their connections. It focuses on the different discourses on death in Japan, and on the rites and doctrines that have shown interest in afterlife. These narrative explorations have taken different forms throughout the history of the country. While in the beginning Shinto, Buddhism and other religions approached the theme of death, historical,

social and cultural changes have decreased the relevance of these belief systems allowing new voices to join the Conversation. Thus, literature on the fantastic and the supernatural proposed abstract explorations of afterlife. A trend that eventually manifested through popular culture texts and media proposing new perspectives to the theme as well as new forms of telling it.

Death and Afterlife in Japan

Although Japan has been considered a religious country until the end of the 20th century, the way its people have related to the different religious faiths present in the country has some significant differences to other contexts (Isomae, 2005; Kawano, 2005; Baffeli, Reader and Staemmler, 2011). To begin with, the term commonly used to refer to "religion", *shūkyō* 宗教, originated from Buddhism, only widely used in the mid-nineteenth century in the context of modernization and Western influence (Reader and Staemler, 2011, 7). *Shūkyō* bears a terminological connotation implicitly associated to a formal entity with organizations and doctrines due to its origins and its use.

Therefore, since the term *shūkyō* refers to religion as institutions it presents conceptual difficulties for the research of practices and beliefs instead of doctrines (Baffeli, Reader and Staemmler, 2011: 8). Those interested in the practices or religious sentiments tend to use the term *shūkyōshin*, which refers to feelings and participation instead of institutions (ibid). But Japanese

approaches to faith have shown another particularity, reporting a low percentage of belief in religion and religious affiliation with the opposite tendency regarding ritual practices and participation. That includes communal activities such as festivals but also praying and memorializing the dead (Reader, 1991; Kawano, 2005; Baffeli, Reader and Staemmler, 2011: 8).

Related to this characteristic, different scholars have argued about a Japanese emphasis of action over belief (Reader, 1991: 15). Some even see a long historical tendency towards such an approach (Kawano, 2005: 9). Therefore, Japanese social life, conventions, hierarchies, behaviours and attitudes have been impregnated by religious practices with nuanced doctrinal knowledge or understanding (ibid). Relations between practice, belief, the sacred and the profane should therefore be approached in Japan with extreme care, addressing its particularities and historical developments. But how have these religious doctrines and practices influenced discourses on the afterlife?

According to some authors Japanese are utterly interested in death, giving it a central role in their lives and customs (Iwasaka and Toelke, 1994; Tsuji, 2011). Death and the afterlife populate their fantastic and supernatural beliefs with narratives and beings which express deep interest in this ultimate passage (Iwasaka and Toelke, 1994). However, the information we have about

death and the afterlife in Japan before the arrival of Buddhism in the sixth century is fragmentary (Stone and Namba, 2008: 3). In pre-Buddhist Japan the spirits of the dead were thought to reside in mountains, over the seas to the *Tokoyo* – the eternal world – or descending to the *Yomi no Kuni* of the Yamato myths. Despite the heterogeneous nature of such systems, all share the idea of a land far away, in contact with our world but somehow separated from it (Iwasaka and Toelken, 1994).

Then, a major moment in afterlife and death related beliefs in Japan was the introduction of Buddhism in the early 6th century. A religion concerned with death and the dead from its beginnings, Buddhism speaks of death as occurring at every moment, as a set of conditions that casually passes away while another arises (Cuevas and Stone, 2007: 1). Understanding such flux requires abandoning the illusion of the self and others-selves, which in turn brings awakening about.

In the Buddhist system death becomes emblematic of the samsaric (cycle of death and rebirth) process of the four sufferings (birth, old age, sickness and death). Death is not only the way things are to be accepted but also the problem the Buddhist project aims to overcome (Cuevas and Stone, 2007). Buddhism then postulates a system by which death may be domesticated and defeated by insight into a larger reality (Reynolds, 1992: 158). But death is also a recurring theme in its

practices, representing the transient and unstable nature of things as much as the suffering to be overcome (Cuevas and Stone: 2007: 2). Death has assumed various forms in Buddhist contemplations from its inevitability to advantageous rebirth through dissolution from the body; almost always including an element of death preparation.

Buddhist social and institutional dimensions are also intermingled with death. Rites for the dead are performed by Buddhist clergies, considered purified by the ascetic discipline they carried out. Performance of funerary and memorial rituals represents the social role of Buddhism, which strengthens ties between laity and religious servers. Funerary rituals reaffirm the message of impermanence as well as the promise to overcome death by following specific steps (Cuevas and Stone, 2007: 2). As Buddhist professionals know how to domesticate such an unavoidable process, their authority is reinforced. Such abilities highlight their ritual power, generating a context for reasserting Buddhist normative ideals.

Therefore, Buddhism managed to establish a monopoly over death in Japan quickly after its arrival (Stone and Namba, 2008: 6). The reasons are varied and complex but can be summarized into three main explanations. The first is Buddhism's intellectually compelling doctrine of an ethicized afterlife which is an incentive for individuals to observe a virtuous behaviour. The second

relates to Buddhism's capacity to assimilate and refigure elements from other traditions incorporating rituals and beliefs already existing and which the Japanese did not wish to abandon (ibid: 5). Finally, the last refers to the perception of Buddhism as a class of religious specialists capable of managing the defilement and dangers death brings, as well as mediating between both worlds.

Buddhism thus managed to maintain its privileged position regarding after death beliefs and funerary rituals and since the end of the 20th century the process of secularization in Japan has had a great impact on its relevance, control and presence. It is a complex process which presents different causes, specific developments and outcomes as it affects all faiths. These characteristics are the focus of the next section as these processes seem to have allowed the introduction of new voices to the EBT conversation due to the fragmentation of previously monopolised discourses.

Japanese Secularisation

Ian Reader defines secularism as the decline of religion and a public withdrawal from engagement with the religious sphere (2012: 9). The presence of such phenomena is, as some authors have argued, not limited to Buddhism (Reader, 2011) or Shinto (Havens, 2006; Breen and van Leeuwen, 2011) but extends to

all faiths including Folk Religion (Chilson, 2010) and New Religions (Baffeli, Reader and Staemmler, 2011).

Partly, disbelief in religious institutions is affected by a questioning of religion in general and its postulates in particular, therefore influencing beliefs in afterlife transcendence. Among the young, belief in any after death realm or existence has declined from 29.9% firmly believing in such and 40.2% believing in some degree in 1992 to 14.9% and 36% respectively seven years later (Inoue, 1999: 75). On the other hand, some scholars have argued that beliefs in afterlife and a netherworld remain popular in Japan (Krause et al, 2002). Others have even supported the idea that wellbeing in this life deeply depends on belief of transcendence after death maintaining its popularity (Ellison, 1991; Miller and Stark, 2002; Imamura et al, 2015). In the Japanese context, Imamura and others have traced continuity from Pure Land Buddhism beliefs on afterlife to improve one's life wellbeing among aging people (ibid). Pure Land will then not only remove fear from death but, at the same time, increase the positive mental state in the present life, allowing people to enjoy longevity.

Furthermore, beliefs in death pollution and rites of passage related to such natural circumstances remain important, especially in rural areas (Kim, 2012). Traditional ritual observances such as grief control maintain their social origin and

impact while also justified by Pure Land Buddhist conceptions. Using extensive fieldwork data, Kim argues that socially and culturally sanctioned behaviours and norms are sustained in Buddhist notions of afterlife transcendence and *samsaric* conceptions (Kim, 2015: 20). For example, crying shows unresolved attachment to the soul of the dead with perilous consequences. The spirit would remain in this world, bound to those who cannot let it go, making it wander, bringing pollution and danger (Douglas, 1966).

Nevertheless, according to several researchers on Japanese religions, the decline of religion and a public withdrawal from engagement with the religious sphere, are widespread phenomena (Kawano, 2005; Tsuji, 2011; Reader, 2012: 9). Even in rural areas the increase of secular or non-institutionalized Buddhist funerary rituals are on the rise (Rowe, 2005). The same is argued by Suzuki who differentiates up to three new funerary ritual forms deeply influenced by non-religious after death beliefs: 1. *seizensō* (living funeral), 2. *mushūkyōsō* (non religious funeral) and 3. *shizenshō* (scattering ashes) (2015).

Such trends towards a decline of religious belief began in 1945 when different surveys from governmental institutions attempted to decrease “people’s superstitious tendencies” (Kawano, 2005: 11). As Reader and others have discussed, religious rites and rituals have since then steadily become much more secular and

in some cases even civic (Reader, 1991: 73; Suzuki, 2015). They, Kawano argues, lack religious content, although some elements might have remained in its core or deeper layers (2005: 8).

Nonetheless, secularism has opened a gap into people's ritual and narrative orientations. The loss of relevance and trust in metanarratives that once served to explain the world and to make sense out of it has caused a deep fragmentation increasing the number of voices participating in now deeply polyphonic conversations (Lyotard, 1984). Postmodernism in Japan has produced a dissemination of knowledge that affects the expression and pursuit of knowledge and a fragmenting of discourse too (Ivy, 1989: 25; Eiji, 2001). In such a context where the scientific does not contribute to a widely accepted solution to answer deeply essential concerns and long-standing worries, fiction emerges as a counterbalance to these deficiencies (Jackson, 1983; Zigarovich, 2012). Therefore, it is possible to witness a context in which the nature of narrative discourse allows us to encompass present solutions and explorations as other overarching solutions from the religious and the scientific are not considered sufficient. In Iser's words literature "promised solutions to problems that could not be solved by the religious, social, or scientific systems of the day" (1978: 6). The aim of the next section will be to explore the characteristics of the medium

to which these fundamental and ancient concerns have been gradually transferred.

The Literary, the Narrative and the Fantastic

When studying literature in secularized contexts some authors have argued that one of the main characteristics of such cultural and social landscape is the lack of any solid hierarchy of thought systems (Jackson, 1983; Zigarovich, 2012). These contexts are affected by conflict among existing epistemologies and ontologies, which eventually makes fiction a counterbalance to the resulting deficiencies. The nature of literature allows the encompassing of contradicting theories eventually, offering solutions once these reach their limits. It is there, in the margins of previous epistemologies where a specific literary genre dwells: the fantastic (Jackson, 1983) included in the wider categories of the fictional and the imaginative (Iser, 1993).

Like the loss of relevance of grand narratives, traditional metanarratives and the incapability of science to calm the existential anxiety left wide spaces fo be filled (Iser, 1978). That argument is shared by Jolene Zigarovich's thesis about 19th century literature of death and loss (2012), a genre in which the fantastic is deeply involved (Jackson, 1983: 23). To Zigarovich, there exists a close relationship between the process of secularization and the rising of narratives about loss and death. She argues that, while on the one hand loss of faith and

individualization created a yearning for certainty, recognition of the unknowable led to the allegorisation of absence, loss and death (Zigarovich, 2012: 1). There, science is not contemplated as an alternative since the discourses it constructs are based on logical and rational explanations. Thus, when dealing with concepts of the supernatural or the uncanny, scientific knowledge is disregarded as it does not have the tools to deal with the unreal (Lyotard, 1984: xxiii).

Therefore, a tension appeared between demands for certainty and enigmatic endings; a representation of two opposite but coexisting tendencies. There is on the one hand the need of knowledge represented by scientific progress and secular thinking, while on the other there is the attraction of the fantastic, supernatural and transcendental beyond the laws of biology and physics. The latter is also fostered by the wish to experiment with the "other" and all that could exist beyond this reality; which is the main function of the fantastic (Jackson, 1983: 3). Thus, it is essential to understand that the fantastic, despite its presentation of alternative forms of reality does not just function as a substitute for the ordinary (Napier, 1996: 5). In other words, the fantastic is not just filling the gaps left by non-fiction works as it relates to that other dimension in a multitude of complex ways. It intermingles elements from the ordinary and the other, blends them readdressing and discussing themes and motives relevant

to our everyday lives. Thus, both genres should be understood together, even when they oppose each other.

Although Zigarovich is talking about Victorian England, the contemporary Japanese context shows some similarities, perhaps not to that time and geographical frame, but at least to its main characteristics that the author argues triggered that particular approach to loss and death (2012: 3). Zigarovich argues that narrating death was important for the cultural and social understanding of separation, absence and displacement in “an ever-increasing chaotic and dismembered world” (ibid). Such observation can also be useful to the Japanese contemporary context from the post War period to the 2000s - although it would require further investigation. For instance, the three main reasons Zigarovich argues were relevant for such context - rapid industrialization and urbanization, decline in faith and belief in the afterlife and increasing scepticism about any established category – are all present in contemporary Japan since the 1960s (Reader, 2011; Tsuji, 2012).

Therefore, from the discussion above we can argue that the fantastic is the manifestation of inner anxieties of a fundamental concern in a culture (Ortner, 2006: 118). Specifically, this project focuses on the incapacity to deal with an irreparable loss beyond our capacity to face and accept it. Therefore, the function of such manifestations is to externalize them, to make those concerns

conceivable and tangible with the aim to understand them by removing them from the uncanny (Geertz, 1973: 99). These narratives present possible maps not about how to behave but as attempts to propose possible orientations in and towards nature (Langer, 1948: 233). Thereby one of their aims is to familiarize the unfamiliar, to understand it and address it through the fluctuating ground that fantasy allows.

That production of fantastic literature dealing with themes of long-standing conversations can be seen as an attempt to deal with what for Geertz (1973) is the most basic human dread: fear of conceptual chaos. Geertz agrees with Susanne Langer that a human "can adapt […] to anything his imagination can cope with; but he cannot deal with Chaos […], his greatest fright is to meet what he cannot construe" (Langer, 1948: 233). Therefore, fantastic literature aims to arrange that chaos, make it symbolically interpretable and reachable to humans' hermeneutical capabilities. It is a way to make it understandable or at least faceable showing a dependency on symbolic orders and constructions to function within the world (Ortner, 2006: 119).

Secularization and postmodernity reopened a challenge, a chaos in which long-standing conversations re-emerged to solve a deep disorientation of the subjects (Jameson, 1983). Irreversible change and fragmentation made individuals fall into recurrent bewilderment (Sennett, 1998: 117) looking again for ways to

make that illegible world interpretable (Ortner, 2006: 125). There the production of narratives is one of the ways humans create meaning and produce understanding of their context (Jameson, 1991; Eiji, 2001). In contemporary Japan the gap left by secularization has been filled in by new media products such as anime “offering a utopian alternative to the theoretical vacuum left by the morass of moral relatives of the postmodern condition” (Bigelow, 2009: 57; Goulding, 2003).

It is in such a context of uncertainty and craving for ontological comprehension - especially since the second lost decade (2000-2011) - when new media that did not exist before - or lacked the level of complexity they acquired (Kinsella, 2000: 3; Bouissou, 2010: 25) – have joined the EBT Conversations. They incorporate themes from previous media such as theatre, literature and cinema (ibid: 26-27). This project studies how these new media have engaged in the EBT conversation, how their participation affects the debate and what can it tell us about the cultural context and the media themselves. I thus understand media first of all as a threefold phenomenon: as an artistic mode of aesthetic production, as a technology and as a social institution (Jameson, 1991: 67). Secondly, my understanding of medium comes from Imamura Taihei (1991), Michel Foucault (1977) and Thomas Lamarre’s (2014) conceptualizations of the term. For these authors medium should be understood as a

dispositif that represents the culture ethico-aesthetic and techno-discursive paradigms in which it is culturally situated (ibid: 237). But now I am going to focus on the relevance and debates surrounding a broader phenomenon, Japanese popular culture, to which these media manifestations belong (ibid: 4).

Japanese Popular Culture

This section deals with the relevance of studying popular culture manifestations. To do so it presents different conceptualisations of that category and debates around their ontology, definition and interest. I argue, however, that the main relevance of popular culture discourses comes from their own nature, from their cultural and social positions and roles. Thus, these popular voices should be understood as engagements on old and new conversations. They speak about and to the human condition, they explore worries, anxieties and hopes and construct new forms of discourses based on their medial capacities and limitations. To study popular culture is to study how and what humans communicate. To comprehend what we communicate is to comprehend our process of becoming, an ontological and existential process (Pérez-Latorre, 2012). Let's now focus on the etymological and epistemological debates around the term.

"Popular" as a category for understanding cultural phenomena brings a series of debates into question, such as the conceptualization of the term or the difference between "low",

“popular” or “high” culture (Egenfeld-Nielsen, Smith and Tosca, 2008; Clarke and Mitchell, 2007; Murphy, 2010). But in the case of Japan the terminology used to address such cultural manifestations and their labelling depends also the concept’s etymology and its composition.

To begin with it will be adequate to address the question of the binary opposition of the categorization of what has been academically understood as “high” and “popular”. For instance, Treat argues that the distinction of high and popular culture relates to the perennial problem of value (1996: 11-12). Value, he argues, it is not only mercurial but also negotiated and constantly under conflict between discursive judgements and hierarchic constructs (ibid).

To understand these concepts as an outcome of different interpretations and revaluations of cultural products allows us to acknowledge the debates and conflicts around these classifications. Thereby, such labelling is the result of different voices with disparate opinions and power relations, thus varying the outcome of these discussions throughout history. To clarify it with an example, in the Japanese context kabuki and woodblock painting during the Edo period (1603-1868) were regarded as low, unworthy products, while now they are almost unanimously acknowledged as highly appreciated artistic expressions (Napier, 2005: 4).

These issues have been also a matter of debate in Japanese Studies (Kato, 1989; Bestor, 1989, Treat, 1996). Some authors have argued that the term “popular culture” bears some significances and differences when compared to Western conceptualizations. To begin with Japanese have tended to understand “popular culture” as *taishū bunka* for the term “popular” was yet not widely acknowledged (Kato, 1989: xvii). The closest equivalent translation of *taishū bunka* would then be “mass culture” in opposition to concepts such as *minshu bunka* (public culture) and *minzoku bunka* (folk culture). Again, these categorizations contain multiple issues such as the boundaries between what is “folk”, “popular”, “public” and “mass” are constantly under negotiation as well as varying depending on the specific cultural product. But at least we can agree that *taishū bunka* is not an exact translation of popular culture. The first part of the term, *taishū*, originated in the Buddhist tradition, bearing an egalitarian meaning that completely erases distinctions of “elite” and “mass” or “high and “low” (Kato, 1989: xviii).

Due perhaps to these epistemological problems, the concept of *taishū* has been gradually replaced by that of *popyurā,* aiming to liberate it from Japanese vocabulary constraints (Treat, 1996: 5). Such a newly configured term also seeks to leave behind conceptualizations of *taishū* or popular culture as vulgar or second rate manifestations (Kato, 1989: xviii). The same can be

said about using popular instead of mass culture, the main target of which is to present an alternative to such pejorative term, deeply influenced by the Frankfurt Marxist School and the works of Adorno (Treat, 1996: 5-6).

But even though some scepticism remains on the interest of researching popular culture and resistance to acknowledging some examples of manga, anime and computer games as art, they still represent relevant sociocultural and aesthetical phenomena (Napier, 2005: 4). Therefore, they are relevant as manifestations of a particular cultural context, transmitters of messages and expressions of marginal and mainstream discourses with a wide reception in the country. That characteristic of popular allows these products to reach and affect a wider variety of audiences compared to other less accessible high cultural materials. Therefore, contrasted to what we today understand as highly sophisticated artistic manifestations such as *noh* theatre or *ikebana* (Treat, 1996: 1) these media are almost constantly present in everyday Japan inundating audiences with their aesthetics and narratives through constant exposure (Bouissou, 2010).

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to consider these cultural utterances just as filling a gap left by traditional narrative forms. Manga, anime and computer games not only coexist with more longstanding media, but they also incorporate and reproduce

modes and aesthetic elements from previous channels of expression such as theatre, paintings or cinema (Napier, 2005). Furthermore, these new media have managed to either maintain or reproduce long-standing themes, debates, worries and hopes as well as introducing new ones – or even combining both. Moreover, even when reproducing ancient narratives, their modes provoke viewers and players on other and different levels than the artistic traditions they sometimes incorporate (Pérez Latorre, 2012).

Therefore, this project works with multimodally rich cultural products that (both) inherit traditional narratives and aesthetics and introduce their own (Napier, 2005: 8). With their wide number of themes, motives and unique ways of addressing them these media offer discourses on contemporary Japan that go beyond mere reflection to the act of transgressing, renegotiation and reshaping mainstream discourses. They are actively engaging in the main conversations of the country from religious themes to concrete debates around Japanese current affairs (Shields, 2013).

The Study of Japanese New Visual Media

New media products such as manga, anime and computer games have shifted from a marginal position and relevance to the centre of significant innovations and cultural debates in Japan (Norris, 2009: 236). They are not identical fields; however, even

so they have become synonymous with a particular contemporary visual and aesthetic culture for many media and scholars, what some have called Japanese Visual Language (VSL) (Cohn, 2008). This section addresses some particularities of each of the media selected for this project, their commonalities and relations.

These visual worlds manifest as no other the rapid shifts, transformations and recurrent changes of the culture of the unstable and metamorphic (Wells, 1998). Such correlation between cultural media manifestations and context might explain, as Napier argues, the importance of expressions such as manga and anime in post-war and post-bubble Japan (Napier, 2005). That is so for their media characteristics (visuals, movement, sequence and speed) and languages but also for their content. In this regard Napier refers to how the modes that these media represent perfectly a culture of constant shifting, velocity and change (ibid). On the other hand, anime, manga and computer games have increased the level of complexity of the themes they address as well as the way they present them (Lamarre, 2010). Such relevance of these cultural utterances situates them at the peak of cultural consumable goods (Napier, 2005) making them key cultural phenomena to be addressed as manifestations of concerns and worries of the members of a society (Pérez Latorre, 2012, 33).

One of the main relevancies for the study of popular cultural media derives from their fundamental role in channelling how people make systems of value and endow sense to their lives (Pérez Latorre, 2012: 26). Computer games, as manga and anime, are a powerful media of representation. Thus, what they represent and the way they do so requires them to be "analysed with the aim of contributing to its comprehension" and the "development as forms of expression" (Sicart, 2003: 10-11).

Some authors have gone even further arguing that some of these new media are privileged vehicles for understanding 21st century Japan (Napier, 2005: 11). Napier argues animation is the ultimate expression of the hopes and nightmares of 21st century uneasiness faced by the Japanese (ibid). A similar affirmation was made by Jameson (1991) who when discussing the video medium who stated that it was the art form par excellence of late capitalism. However, as Napier (2005) and other authors have argued, manga and computer games are intermingled with anime, sharing modes, themes and sometimes franchises and characters (Johnson-Woods, 2010) making these other media as relevant. They all form part of a same ethic-aesthetic ecology that creates a deeply interrelated expressive environment (Steinberg, 2004: 294). Such media are a fusion of technology and art that suggests in their forms, modes and content new interfaces

between artistic and technological representational capabilities (Napier, 2005: 11).

With their growing popularity these media have become an important area of scholarly analysis (Norris, 2009: 255, Egenfeldt, Smith and Tosca, 2008). But in the beginning these analyses considered new media as worryingly disruptive manifestations of a troubled society. First, these media were considered just as extremely violent (Norris, 2009), sexual or even pornographic (Bouissou, 2010) and depicting and maintaining gender inequality through the objectification of women. Less superficial investigations appeared with the passing on time. These shifted the focus now centred on either their political economy (Kinsella, 2000), their motifs and key factors for their popularity (Napier, 2009) and their semiotics (Okuyama, 2005). Questions of gender remained popular but now approached understanding the complexities the media presented and the transgressions some authors introduced (McLelland, 2008: 77). This academic research on such media has, until now, mostly focused on two main aspects: their properties, languages and modes on the one side and their narrative art forms on the other.

Moreover, these media have shown a level of complexity in their discourses comparable to literature or cinema making them cultural manifestations worth researching (Lamarre, 2010; Pérez Latorre, 2012: 26). Therefore, since every utterance is culturally

significant, it deserves thorough study. To approach the themes of such utterances and the way they address them this project proposes a triple approach: the study of each medium's internal characteristics, the semiotics and meanings the authors included in their discourse and, lastly, how both levels relate to each other in the making of a communicative discourse. In other words, how the media language channels the messages allowing and restricting the making and transmission of significance as well as how the semiotics of these texts use the capacities of the medium to share a particular message (Pérez Latorre, 2012). Each of these levels is relevant in itself, as some authors have already pointed out (Cohn, 2010; Pérez Latorre, 2012).

However, the study of their connections and use in the making of utterances to engage in the cultural conversations presents a field yet open to investigation. That is so especially now that new media have created a "fantastyscape database" (Ruh, 2014: 173) engaging with what Henry Jenkins defined as media convergence, a cultural shift to make connections across dispersed media content (Jenkins, 2006: 3). These relations can help the understanding of how contemporary voices join longstanding conversations and the implications of these as social activities (Weber, 2005). Therefore, these texts will be seen as socially symbolic acts (Jameson, 1983), engaged with their culture and the semiotic systems in which they operate.

New Voices and Media in an Ancient Conversation

As it was advanced in the previous section the object of study of this project is the way new participants have used recent types of media to engage in a longstanding discussion in Japan: the transgression of life and death boundaries, perhaps the most essential taboo as framed in the different texts. As already explained the loss of relevance of religions and people's ascription to the available metanarratives produced a shift towards a landscape of fragmented narratives that increased the number of voices and participants in those conversations (Gee, 1999: 35). In such a context some of the voices that were added to the debate have joined it using media that were not available before and which present some particularities and multimodal characteristics. These formal and internal languages affect the construction of the discourses as well as their content and the way they are received (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 34).

Therefore, the main aim of this project is to understand the participation of new media in the EBT conversation. To do so this study proposes three different stages that will address each different quality of the utterances involved in the EBT debate. The first stage corresponds to a medial description of the modes, characteristics and elements that construct the language of each medium. The second will aim for an interpretation of the semiotic processes these specific cultural manifestations present with the

objective of constructing meaning from their content and the intertextual relations they stablish (Gee, 1999: 21). Finally, the third presents an analysis on the combination between media and message, and how that text relates to the wider EBT conversation. That is, a focus on the telling of a story through a particular communicative vehicle, how is the theme thought through the medium and the medium through the engagement on the EBT debate.

Once the construction of these utterances is understood it will be more feasible to comprehend their role in the EBT conversations. I can then approach the participation of these new voices in the EBT debate and how the context has framed these new engagements. Therefore, the analysis will depart from the specificity of the text to a wider relation with the context to address an even broader landscape: the EBT Conversation and the way these utterances engaged in that polyphonic intertextuality. Let's now begin by briefly explaining each strand.

Medial Analysis

First, the overarching question of how the theme is constructed in these media relates to how meaning is made through the respective media. To answer this question some authors have recurred – each in their medium – to an approach in which the first stage is to understand their medium as a particular kind of communicative work, as for example Neil Cohn for manga (2010),

Thomas Lamarre for anime (2010) and Pérez Latorre for computer games (2012). These authors share previous arguments that new media use not only the pre-existent creative codes available but have also created their own new and particular languages (McLuhan, 1997). As such, they present different characteristics from previous media bearing also a great creative potential due to their new modes and features (Napier, 2005) and even most profusely in Japan (Lamarre, 2010).

Therefore, the first stage of this project's approach to these media refers to the understanding of their languages. One of the main contributors to such comprehension is Neil Cohn who has for years studied the characteristics and functioning of Japanese Visual Language (JVL) (2008: 188). One of the outstanding features is the specificities Visual Language has presented in Japan thus being possible to talk about its own specific visual system. According to some authors visuals in Japan introduce a particular and differentiated aesthetic style (Rommens, 2000), which includes sequential specificities and structural constructions (McCloud, 1993; Cohn, 2008).

Nevertheless, the first salient element of all VL is its use of signs and icons as part of its vocabulary which organizes mental patterns into legible conceptual expressions using specific modes which conform to a "language" (Cohn, 2008: 189). That linguistic conformation has first to pass through a culture which

reshapes it, crafting a particular form derived from negotiations on content and meaning. However, to be legible any language requires a process of standardization that constrains its possibilities at the same time as it provides a systematic pattern to be learnt.

But what gives language its main relevance is not the components but the relations it establishes and the meaning inferable from such construction (Cohn, 2008: 194). JVL grammar is not only the basic foundation of discourse and communication but it also bears the relevance of being the first stage in the making of meaning and signification. For instance, the way in which sequence is produced in JVL creates a certain aesthetical outcome which evokes time, narrative structure, speed, action development or mood setting (McCloud, 1993: 81). Meaning is then inferred from grammatical organizations of the vocabulary of a language.

However, JVL alone will not allow a complete understanding of the media here under study as anime and computer games, although deeply influenced by manga and relying on its visuals, include other modes that engage in the discourse construction, such as audio, movement or interactivity in the case of games (Bucy, 2004: 375; Pérez Latorre, 2012). These modes, despite being frequently neglected by audio-visual researchers,

introduce relevant information, cultural references, emotion markers, semiotics and intertextual participation.

Therefore, once we have understood the internal components of each medium, their relations and structures, it will be time to proceed to the next level of the project: the interpretation of how these formal elements conform and construct meaning in the text. Thus, to comprehend the making of significance by these media the next section will address how the project approaches semiotics.

Visual Cultural Semiotics

Semiotics as a field began in the 19th century with the goal of understanding signification and meaning and how they are constructed (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001: 28). Semiotics originated from the theories of the American philosopher Charles Peirce and Swiss linguistic Ferdinand de Saussure. The former was more interested in a science of signs in which language and thought are considered processes of sign interpretation. For Peirce meaning resides in the interpretation of the perception and subsequent action based on that perception of the sign. Therefore, Peirce's theories postulate semiotics as the way in which humans make sense of a world that otherwise would be impossible to understand. But meaning is not only that interpretation but also the subsequent actions or processes it stimulates (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001: 28).

One of the aims of this project is to adapt theories limited to the written text to visual analysis and the construction of narratives through images (Barthes, 1977; Metz, 1974). Visual analysis has since then focused on the coded languages of images, the relations between signs and the hermeneutical and semiotic process they stimulate or, in the case of cultural and social semiotics the pragmatics, uses and negotiations regarding significance (Eco, 1976; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). These latter approaches to semiotics are useful and relevant as they allow the study of signs and meaning as a process in constant change, subject of negotiation and transformation (Lorusso, 2015). Otherwise, the significance of certain cultural elements would be seen as a finalized, rigid and immobile product. In opposition to that essentialized approach semioticians such as Umberto Eco, anthropologists like Clifford Geertz have argued about the relevance of comprehending how signs are the outcome of constant public debates, discursive dialogues and contextual alterations (Geertz, 1973; Eco, 1976).

Understood in this way semiotics bears a close connection with human communicative processes (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 5). They acquire relevance for and in a culture through public sharing and transmission. That is the process in which signs and meaning get defined and redefined, through the negotiation of codes and social significance (Geertz, 1973: 6).

Therefore, semiotics gain their importance in the making of sense but more specifically as that significance is shared through the construction of discourse that encodes messages whose relevance derives from that very process of publicizing them.

Narrative Discourse and Communication

The study of narrative discourse implies researching a form of meaningful symbolic behaviour (Bloomaert, 2005: 2) and the organization of it. It is not only language in action and pragmatic semiosis into context as it refers to a more dynamic, flexible and activity-centred human communication (Verschueren, 1995). In other words, what we are dealing here with is not just the study of how language is used or meaning creating. It deals with the construction of narrative discourses and their sharing as human behaviour. Not only the content or how it was produced is of interest but also the act of sharing it as key to the social action, to the making of culture. If culture is the study of the nets of patterns and meanings shared by humans (Geertz, 1973) then communication as an act is at its core. It comes from the contacts and overlaping of linguistics, literary analysis, anthropology, semiosis and sociology (Hymes, 1983). From this perspective it can be addressed as compromising “all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural, and historical patterns and developments of use” (Bloomaert, 2005: 3).

Discourse is then deeply interrelated not only with the context, the semiotic and linguistic traditions in which it is produced and the cultural conversations in which it participates (Gee, 1999), but also with the medium in which it is transmitted (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). In such a process of crafting and encoding (Hall, 1999) discourse analysis allows us to understand how a text aims to matter to people as well as the features that produce meaning and significance (Bloomaert, 2005: 4). In such process I include the forms and operations that collaborate in the making of sense. These operations include the internal characteristics of any text, together with the language of the medium and their semiotic process and context.

Now, before the end of this chapter it is useful to sum up and clarify the main question this project aims to address and some secondary considerations deriving from them.

How are different authors in contemporary Japan participating in EBT conversations using new media forms? Regarding that question we have to understand the particular communicative vehicles these authors are using and thus address:

How do these media channel, restrict and allows, the construction of specific discourses based on their multimodal capacities and constraints? I am focusing not so much on the formal characteristics of each medium as on the use the authors make of them and the social discursive activities produced. But

ultimately my interest is not centred on the forms of these discourses but on their content, their organization and their social use and potentialities as active engagements of different authors in these debates. Therefore, I am seeking to understand:

What are the social, cultural and individual concerns represented by EBT that the authors express and how are they constructed and shared? By answering that final question I will then be able to acknowledge:

Which are the boundaries these authors are maintaining and transgressing and what does that say about Japanese contemporary expressions regarding their ontological condition? After all, these utterances are expressing different social agents' meditation of the EBT and the motives they carry with them in the context of 21st century Japanese society. The aim of this project is to understand what these meditations are, how are they communicated and how are they engaging in the EBT conversations, that is ultimately, in ontological debates about the human condition in postmodern Japan.

However, considering that the object of study of this project is the EBT conversation in contemporary Japan and that most, if not all, new voices that engage in such debates are doing so in a basis of intertextuality with previous utterances it is necessary to begin this project with a brief history of the conversation. Therefore, the next chapter provides a description, review and interpretation of

how EBT debates originated in Japan, their historical development and their most salient representations. Through that historical survey the selected sample of this project can first be situated and then contextualised. But also, that genealogy of intertextual debates about EBT presents the debate as a dynamic human made process, affected and related to contextual structures as much as authors' particular choices and levels of subjectivity connected with it.

Chapter I. A Genealogy of the EBT Conversation in Japan

This chapter explores the main texts that have dealt with and discussed the theme of death and life boundary transgression in Japan. Therefore, this chapter presents a historical development of the theme and how it has been approached by different texts, media and their specific contexts. The chapter is structured chronologically beginning with the first historical account that deals with the EBT theme, the *Kojiki,* up to the Second Lost Decade. I here discuss how the theme proves its relevance for Japanese culture by its permanence and recurrence across history. The chapter discusses how the theme has journeyed through history, which shows the EBT as a dynamic human production that changes depending on context-based decisions by the authors.

From this overview I develop the main argument of this PhD, that the EBT engagements of the Second Lost Decade follow the logic of the interrogation of every category and boundary manifested in the 1990s. During the last decade of the 20th century, different agents showed a deep mistrust of the categories and narratives that were established in Postwar Japan. In a rapidly changing cultural and social landscape both

individuals and groups renegotiated essential categorical boundaries. Then, in the Second Lost Decade, the EBT became an abstract narrativization of the same challenges to Japanese ontologies and epistemologies that deal with the individual and its place in the world. Some of these engagements aimed to find some solid existential bedrock while others continued the questioning of every possible limit. In other words, what these engagements on the EBT conversation present is a response to the liquification of previously solid boundaries.

Finally, the chapter closes by introducing the sample of this project. The last section discusses the sample's relevance and their relation to contemporary Japanese media, semiotic processes and in general a philosophy of communication through visual sequential narratives.

The Relevance of the Kojiki *to the EBT Conversation*

The first historical narrative dealing with the theme of life and death boundary transgression in Japan is the *Kojiki*, the *Records of Ancient Matters*. The *Kojiki* is the oldest preserved Japanese written source and was presented by Ō-no-Yasumaro to the court of Empress Gemmei in 710-711 (Rubio and Tani, 2013). Traditionally, the *Kojiki* has been divided into three main parts: one mythical, one heroic and one pseudo historical. It is the first section that includes the cosmogenesis of the Japanese islands,

that is, their creation according to the mythologies surrounding the Yamato area (central Japan). Regarding the EBT the *Kojiki* is important for being the first written source to include the theme but also as a primordial foundational text. In other words, the *Kojiki* established a referential structure for EBT narratives with a pattern to be followed, respected or altered.

The theme of EBT appears in the first part of the *Kojiki* after the gods Izanagi (male) and Izanami (female) create the Japanese islands and every living being. When the cosmogenesis of Japan is almost complete Izanami passes away. Facing such loss Izanagi decides to journey to *Yomi no Kuni* (the first historical mention of a netherworld, a land of the dead) to revive his love. There he asks his wife to return as he misses her greatly. She first refuses for she has already eaten the food of the dead so she cannot return, but she leaves to consult the gods of Death asking her husband to wait in the darkness. Tired of waiting Izanagi breaks the promise and using a light he finds his wife's body covered in maggots and with each of the eight thunder deities coming out from different parts of her corpse. The god is then struck with fear and decides to run away.

The angered Izanami sends a horde of spirits of the dead and the gods of thunder to pursue Izanagi. Eventually she decides to go after him herself. In the pursuit Izanagi manages to distract

Izanami managing to escape the *Yomi no Kuni* and block the access with a giant rock.

There, on either side of the the rock blocking the access to the *Yomi no Kuni* the two gods talk for the last time. Izanami proclaims that every day she would strangle one thousand folk of Izanagi's land. To that, Izanagi replies he would then give life to one thousand and five hundred, thus assuring life would continue but bringing death and pollution to the world. Thereby, although he manages to avoid the total destruction of the world he disrupts the balance of the cosmos by mingling both realms and disrespecting their rules.

Scholarly Approaches to the Kojiki

The *Kojiki* has attracted attention from different scholars, perspectives and disciplines. Some have focused on the *Kojiki*'s hermeneutics (Isomae, 2000), others on gender relationships in the myth (Lai, 1992) while some have researched the text using Religious Studies (Kamstra, 1967; Uyeda, 1991) or psychoanalytical approaches (Berne, 1975). The interest in the *Kojiki* derives from different characteristics of the text, the context and the relevance it has to the history of Japan. That is because the *Kojiki* is not only the first text written in Japan and in Japanese but also for the recurrence to it by some essential authors throughout different periods in Japanese history. To these approaches I offer an anthropological reading, one that considers

the EBT as an abstraction, a narrativized discourse on ontological and existential explorations of humanity. To do that I refer to theories of pollution and purification and the setting up of boundaries and categories (Douglas, 1966).

One of the most relevant periods in which the *Kojiki* recovered much of its centrality was during the Edo Period (1603-1868), with the nativist movement of Motoori Norinaga (1730-1868). The importance of Norinaga's interpretations comes from the deep interest they generated in his time and in future generations. Thus, according to Iomae Jun'ichi (2000), Norinaga's interpretation of myths like the *Kojiki* or the *Nihon Shoki* lays the foundations from which we interpret these ancient texts.

Norinaga's impact is even more notable during the creation of the Modern Japanese State and the new cult to the Emperor. It was then, from mid-to late-19th century when Shinto, as a newly constructed doctrine needing a foundational text made the *Kojiki* its primordial metanarrative. Norinaga and Hirata Atsutane completed the process started in the medieval period in which Shinto developed a sense of self-identity and self-awareness (ibid). Both thinkers aimed to purify the rituals of the kami of Confucian and Buddhist taints, a process that will lead to the law of separation of the kami and the Buddhist deities during Meiji (Stone, 2006). But the *Kojiki* was not incorporated only for the exegesis and hermeneutics produced by Norinaga and other

relevant nativist scholars. The content of the text itself deeply influenced the fathers of the nation in in their understandings of Shinto (Havens, 2006)

But now, let's focus on the relevance the *Kojiki* bears as a first EBT narrative based on its content and the possible exegesis derived from the journey to the *Yomi no Kuni*. First, as already pointed out, Izanagi's visit to the netherworld can be situated within a set of myths found around the world (Berne, 1975). Examples can be found in the Ancient Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (Kamstra, 1967; Fredricksmeyer, 2007), Baldur's in the pagan Nordic tradition (Gaiman, 1999; Harris, 2004) or in some Native American stories such as those found in Chili Mapuche Amerindians (González, 2001). However, the Japanese version bears some contextual particularities which are relevant for my study as they will be found in almost all EBT manifestations in Japan. The first element to consider in regarding Izanagi's journey is the structure of the myth:

Death of a loved female→Unacceptance of the situation→ Transgression of the separation between life and death→ Attempt to revive the female→Revival failure→Pollution and complications from it→Resolution with a nuanced pollution.

Each of these formal stages corresponds to a situation in the myth. The third stage is represented by the god's decision to go

to a forbidden place - the *Yomi no Kuni* - transgressing a natural separation that represents the ontologically differentiated realms. His attempt to revive Izanami is shown by Izanagi asking her to come back with him. He, nevertheless, fails, disobeys his wife's prohibition and discovers the pollution present, breaking the rules of the netherworld as well as making the separation plainly visible. The complication is represented by the dead trying to seize Izanagi and his pursuit. Finally, although the god manages to block the pass and reinforce the separation of both worlds he has not only failed in his quest to revive his wife but has also brought death to a great number of living beings. The passage concludes that when the living visit the dead, death will accompany them back blending both states and bringing disaster to the world.

Therefore, the main exegetical moral from that first encounter with the dead shows how the EBT not only brings failure to the reviving of the deceased loved one but also carries a negative outcome to the transgressor in particular or even the world in general. For instance, in the *Kojiki* Izanagi's goal is to recover his dead love. By going to *Yomi no Kuni,* not only is he almost trapped there by the dead, not only does he fail to revive his wife but also, and most dangerous and relevant for the world, he brings pollution and death to the world of the living. Thereby he not only fails in his quest for Izanami's soul but he also harms the living, brings a negative outcome to the world and disrupts the

dead. It can thus be argued that the EBT act is represented both as predetermined to fail and with dangerous consequences that surpass the transgressor (Douglas, 1966).

The Shamanistic Explanation

Another interpretation of EBT narratives has established a relationship between such themes and the journey of the soul in Japanese shamans (Clois, 1960; Yen, 1974). According to this approach, the EBT refers to the shamanistic journey to a different dimension. Such a thesis brings some complexities since there are unresolved debates regarding shamanism in Japan, from their activities (Blacker, 1987) to their very existence beyond Ainu communities (Fairchild, 1962). This discussion is relevant for the implications of ascribing Japanese specialists to a shamanistic tradition. First, if Japanese supernatural specialists can be categorized as shamans that will mean that they and their traditions share the same origin as the Ainu, the Siberian plains communities or the Amerindian groups. They, therefore, would come from the same origin in Siberia which is – apparently not the case for non-Ainu groups in Japan. It would also mean that Japanese supernatural specialists have the same functions and practices of those that fall into the category of shamanism, which again is unlikely. Therefore, labelling the Japanese spiritual experts as shamans will be misguiding to the study of their precedence, origins, functions and rituals.

In Japan – with the exception of Hokkaido (Fairchild, 1962) and Okinawa (Takiguchi, 1984) - the closest figure to the shaman is the female specialist called *Itako* (Sasamori, 1997). According to Sasamori *Itako* are specialists on contacting the dead through possession by them (1997: 85). They can then mediate between the dead and the living during the *o-bon* festival (explained in the next section) when possession is more effective.

However, others have argued that shamans do not get possessed by spirits, being in control of the situation and thus managing to contact as well as transmit death or gods' messages (Sullivan, 1993) making Japanese *itako* a non-shamanistic specialist. Thereby, debates around the presence of shamanism in Japan derive from two main conceptual problems: how strict it is the definition of shamanism and the relation between shamans and *itako* rituals. That is relevant because framing Japanese spiritual specialists as shamans will suppose they share the main characteristics with that specific tradition. However, the functions, rituals and practices of Japanese professionals of the supernatural are different enough to keep them from being categorized as shamans. The incomprehension will go further as understanding of how Japanese culture relates to the netherworld and the dead might be misleading and confusing.

Regarding to the content of Izanagi's journey and its relation to shamanistic activities the correlation presents various

complexities. To begin with, the journey undertaken by Izanagi is not to contact Izanami's spirit as in the case of shamans, who do it by others' requests. Izanagi travels to the netherworld not just to contact the dead but to revive his deceased wife. Thereby, the ideally controlled act of getting information, pacifying or exorcising a spirit so common among shamans (Sasamori, 1990) is not present in the myth of Izanagi. Furthermore, it can be argued that, while shamans try to pacify this world's need to contact the dead through safe performances, Izanagi's was doing the opposite, blending both realms and erasing the liminal separation between them. Thereby, although communal encounters with the dead such as the *o-bon* festival (Rowe, 2011) or contact by a third-party specialist (Takiguchi, 1984) are accepted and recommended, the attached unacceptance of death is the what the *Kojiki* advises against.

Such problematic interpretation of the EBT as shamanistic journeys has led some to dismiss such approaches (Kamstra, 1963: 438). To Kamstra, the story of Izanagi should be categorized as a netherworld tale with the EBT as a major narrative theme: it serves both as a foundational structure to the narrative as well as proposing a moral to be transmitted throughout an appealing and conventionally told story.

However, the theme introduces also some elements that can be found in subsequent narratives. For instance, in all Japanese

EBT narratives the transgressor is a man who cannot accept the death of a woman. Such reproduction and permanence of gender relationships (male transgressor and female objectification), connections between living and dead, transgressors and offended present relevancies already addressed by gender or feminist studies (Lai, 1992). For instance, Lai argues that Japan's "patriarchal fallacies" are supported or grounded on mythological foundational texts such as the *Kojiki* in Japan. To her, gender inequality, patriarchal social organization and the political marginalization of women derives from texts such as the *Kojiki* and especially from the representation of women as polluted and polluting agents.

Nevertheless, a quick inspection of the *Kojiki's* and the subsequent EBT based narratives present us an intriguing ambiguity: if it is the woman who is negatively depicted in the narrative, why it is then the male who misbehaves, betrays his lover and puts the world at risk for his own emotional disruptiveness? That problematic was also addressed by Kamstra for whom Izanagi's visit to the *Yomi no Kuni* shows the deep magical power women had at that time in Japan (1963: 441). We should also not forget that it was a woman who commanded the writing of the *Kojiki* (Rubio and Rumi, 2013). Furthermore, it is a goddess at the top of Shinto's pantheon from whom the Emperor was believed to descend (Kamstra, 1963: 441).

Nevertheless, perhaps the main contradiction to Lai's point is again in the content of the myth showing the transgressor as an attached and selfish male incapable to manage his desires and emotions.

Finally, this PhD addresses and approaches the EBT from the anthropological theory of Mary Douglas regarding the setting of boundaries, categories and cosmological systems (1966). Prohibitions due to pollution and the need for purification originate from the blending of categories that surpass our cognitive and epistemological capacities. Thus, when cultures, groups or communities establish order on the world they observe, everything that falls in the category of the mixed, liminal or unclassified brings peril and chaos. This fear of the lack of harmony is resolved by the setting of limits, of prohibitions and consequences. In that logic, the most essential and universal boundary is that which divides life and death, two differentiated states around whose blurry limits are manifested through myths, dreams and other narrative forms.

While the fear of blending life and death is a universal theme, at least in the case of the *Kojiki* the EBT refers to human wishes to have control over the inevitability of death, of the workings of nature and the cosmos. The *Kojiki* sets up the consequences of such an act. Trying to reverse the flow of nature is not only perilous for the transgressor but also for the whole universe.

Moreover, the EBT is bound to fail, in fact, instead of bringing life by denying death it amplifies the latter through the pollution it extends over the world. The EBT is, as it was established in the *Kojiki,* a tale about what is beyond mortal control, the fate to accept our limits and the danger of death non-acceptance. However, as this chapter argues, the EBT as a theme, as a narrative structure, joins contextual debates from the time where it is debated. Its abstract nature facilitates a constant rereading of its proposal to explore both universal worries and contextually specific concerns.

The Faraway Land

The second main motif in the *Kojiki* is the journey to a faraway land and the transgression of the boundaries between life and death. As in the previous examples from other cultures, the soul of the dead resides in a place that is, although accessible and thus connected to the world of the living, somehow separated and far away from it. However, there are in Japan different views of where and how the dead dwell in the afterlife (Naumann, 2000: 56). Although in the *Kojiki* the netherworld was depicted in an extremely negative way, repulsive and sad, other myths present different possibilities for an afterlife such as the *Ne no kuni* or the Land of Roots (Naumann, 1996).

However, the *Kojiki*'s leaves room for future religions to complete its cosmology as it references other possible afterlifes (Kamstra,

1983; 443). For instance, both in the *Kojiki* and later in the *Nihon Shoki* (720) there are references to some other lands that might be related to the *Yomi no Kuni,* although they do not specify which. In the *Kojiki* they are called the *ne no katasu kuni* (the Land of the Solid Roots State) while in the *Nihon Shoki* just *ne no kuni* (the Land of Roots), and both are related to the god Susanoō (Naumann, 2000: 56), who has a complex and obscure character as the ruler of life and death. It is especially hard to understand his nature as recollections of myths in which he is present have been both manipulated and misinterpreted (Naumann, 1996). Finally, there are two main ideas to stress, one that the *Yomi no Kuni* is the first mention of a netherworld and second, that the Kojiki foresees the possibility to incorporate new afterlife beliefs.

The last example of netherworlds in Japan is the *tokoyo*, the eternal world or the eternal darkness depending on the kanji the authors choose (Kamstra, 1963: 447). [1] However, both in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* the term refers to an eternal world. A similar concept of a faraway land is present in traditional oral narratives of Japanese folklore (Yen, 1974). Such a place bears the notion of being an eternal land, imported from Chinese literature (Kamstra, 1967: 450). This abundance of netherworlds

[1] The tokoyo in Japanese can be written as: 常夜 which means “an eternal night” while the furigana regularly used, とこやみ implies getting pitch black (for a developed discussion see Kamstra, 1969: 447)

bears relevance as it will allow for a profusion of possible other planes of existence, which we find discussed in postwar Japanese literature.

It can thus be concluded that the *Kojiki* presents at least three main elements that have matter of academic interest: the journey to the netherworld, gender relations in the EBT with special attention to the role of the goddess, and the characterization of the netherworld. Each of them bears controversies that this section has aimed to clarify. Regarding the netherworld visit, although it is a theme shared by mythologies all around the world, the focus in this section has been on the characteristic elements of the content in the Japanese version. Such an approach has showed a defined structure to be followed or negotiated by future EBT narratives recurring through time.

The second point, gender relations in the *Kojiki* is perhaps one of the most controversial debates around myths and literature in general. One of the main issues is our lack of convincing evidence to relate myth and social organization based on gender in Japan. But even before that, the text itself presents contradictions to the mainstream feminist theories about the *Kojiki*. The content shows an ambiguous representation of the deceased and the transgression not being clear about which of the characters is negatively represented. Thereby, while on the one hand Izanami is a pollutant since her passing away, it is

Izanagi who mingles both worlds and puts the world at risk for his uncontrolled desires. Such complications with regards to gender in the EBT narratives lead this study to acknowledge the interest of such approaches, the complexities of the content of such texts and their possible relations to their social repercussions.

Finally, the netherworlds from Japanese tradition and that represented in Izanagi's myth bear some similarities. This section has aimed to introduce the wide landscape of afterlife possibilities in Japan and how they might contradict as well as implement the *Kojiki's* netherworld. Thereby we can trace a deep interest in the afterlife due to these available possibilities, a manifestation of the appeal of netherworld and soul's transcendence for the Japanese. From this section we can conclude that although the Japanese have produced many alternatives regarding existence beyond this world at the same time they all share some basic characteristics. The main one, shared by all narratives, is the condition of both separation and connection between this world and the other. As will be shown in the following sections, that conception was incorporated in future literary manifestations and profusely in postwar Japan.

Post- Kojiki Conversations in Premodern Japan

Since the *Kojiki* the theme of death and life boundary transgression has been reproduced in a multitude of forms, media and periods. In 720, just a few years after the *Kojiki*, a new

text was written in Japanese: the *Nihon Shoki* – The Chronicles of Japan (Kamstra, 1967). Although the *Nihon Shoki* changes myths such as the deeds of Emperor Jimmu, the myth of Izanagi was reproduced almost exactly from the *Kojiki* (ibid).

However, the repetition of some themes such as EBT narratives does not end with the writing of the main myth and legend manuscripts (Sakaguchi, 1935). Throughout Japanese literature and narrative history we find stories about netherworlds and their connection with this world. Already in the Nara period the legend *Tango no Kuni Fudoki* (Records of Tango) (710-784) addressed the hero's journey to the netherworld. A version of the same theme is found in Heian period (794-1200) texts such as the *Urashima koden* (Legend of Urashima*)* and *Mizukagami* (The Water Mirror) (Kawai, 1996: 84). Also, during the Kamakura Shogunate (1200-1392) interest on reproducing such themes remained in the *Mumei sho*, *Koji-dan* (a collection of oral stories) and *Uji Shūi Monogatari (The Tale of Uji Shūi)* as well as in Muromachi Japan (1392-1573) with *Otogi Zōshi* (a collection of prose narratives) and Noh dramas in which such themes are repeatedly incorporated (ibid: 85).

During Heian Japan the *Genji monogatari (The Tale of Genji),* written by Lady Murasaki Shikibu in early 11th century, includes many EBT references. In Murasaki's work treatment of EBT narratives is more strongly present than in the previous legends.

Genji's story tells about hostile relationships between men and women in the Heian Court (Napier, 1996; Hughes, 2000). But the narrative bears a great significance for the EBT theme. If there are two main themes in Japan regarding living-dead encounters these are: the transgression of such boundaries by males trying to revive a woman and *yūrei* or ghost stories. Genji's tale includes both being the former and the cause of the latter. The first is exemplified by Genji's longing for his deceased mother, an unresolved situation that causes the second, Genji's constant love affairs with courtesans (Napier, 1996) which leads one of them to become a possessing ghost (Hughes, 2000: 65).

Thus, if the myth of Izanagi's journey established a foundation structure for male attempts to revive female lovers, *The Tale of Genji* serves as a structural pattern to be followed by ghost narratives (Napier, 1996). However, although both themes relate to the blending of life and death and both are deeply influenced by gender relations they bear significant differences. For instance, while Izanagi's story is motivated by male attachment, selfishness and attempt to bring back to life someone who has departed, ghost stories have to do with unresolved situations, jealousy, possession and obsessed unsettled relationships (Hughes, 2000: 65). One of the interests from *The Tale of Genji* is how both themes are presented together while the EBT originates the theme of female ghosts, recurrent in Japan.

The theme started by *The Tale of Genji* was most profusely developed centuries later, in the Edo Period (1603-1868). Not only was such theme abundantly found in literature of the time, but it also expanded to Noh and Kabuki drama as well as other media including wood-block prints (Hughes, 2000: 66). It is in this period that EBT narratives that follow the structure presented in the *Kojiki* started to introduce relevant changes in stories that revolt around the gender of the deceased. One of the main examples is *Aozukin* (*Blue Hood)* by Akinari Ueda (1776). In the story a wandering monk meets a priest who has gone mad in the village of Tonda. The reason for his insanity is the death of the boy whom the priest loved and his persistence in keeping the corpse close to himself. Such madness eventually makes the priest ingest the body to avoid the corpse rotting and finally disintegrating. The necrophilic rage of the priest is eventually extended to the whole village as he starts to dig up and feast on the flesh of the village's corpses. Such attitude extremely contradicts Buddhist metaphysics that regard the body as a mere material vehicle of the spirit in opposition to the priest's attachment to the dead and its materiality (Hughes, 2000: 68).

Such profuse spreading of the theme through time and space allowed it to be found by the first ethnologists when they began to collect folktales of rural Japan. Then, when Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962) and other researches collected oral narratives –

setsuwa – they found stories they had no knowledge of and others reproducing primordial Japanese texts (Asano, 1996: 60). That brings up two relevant elements to this project: one, the persistence of a theme that has survived being popularly readdressed through time and, second, the transference of the theme throughout different media: orality, written texts and theatre among others.

Such thematic survival throughout time made Yanagita hypothesize about the concept of "the common human" – *jōmin* (Mori, 1980: 89). To Yanagita the representative Japanese common human assures continuity from its prehistoric and ancestral beginnings. *Jōmin* maintain the spiritual structures and customs of these previous stages, their ancestors, coexisting with them. It is therefore possible to access a timeless Japanese core, spirit and psyche through the study of the manifestations of that *jōmin*.

The concept thus presents similarities to German *verstehen*, coined by philosopher Willhem Dilthey (1833-1911). *Verstehen*, commonly translated as comprehension, has been used from 19th century mainly in interpretative sociology. It postulates that we, as humans, have the capacity to understand through participative interpretation any other human act no matter its spatial or temporal situation (O'Hear, 1997). However, belief in an unbroken line between ancient and contemporary Japan not

only lacks empirical foundations but also misguides research on current cultural utterances (Treat, 1996). Thus, as Yu Mizuno (1975) pointed out, legends should be studied based on the historical transformations they present as they reflect important cultural characteristics from their era and it should be mandatory not to just assume an unbroken line through millennia.

But Yanagita's collection of legends also has relevance for it has allowed later researchers to investigate Japanese narrative content and thematic patterns. Two scholars in particular have paid special attention to the theme of netherworld journeys: Alsace Yen (1974) and Kawai Hayao (1977). First, Yen's sample consists of narratives dealing with male journeys to the netherworld. Within that corpus of materials, she includes stories based both on heroes' quests to cure a princess' sickness as well as EBT narratives. Thus, since both sets share the visit to the netherworld Yen hypothesizes that they represent the shaman's journey to acquire a way to treat an illness, as Clois postulated (1960). Such interpretation might work for the first narratives as they present correlations such as the patient's request, the travelling to another realm, contact with a different dimension and overcoming of peril and, finally, curing sickness and getting a reward (Yen, 1974: 6). However, the main problem comes with the linking of shamanistic practices and EBT stories. In them the protagonist is not helping anyone, but he tries to satisfy his own

feelings of attachment. He then egoistically disrupts ontological and biological limits bringing calamity to this world, an almost opposite situation to shamanistic activities.

The second author who has shown great interest in netherworld journeys in Japanese narratives is Kawai Hayao, who approached similar materials as Yen but with a different although not incompatible hypothesis. To Kawai, any journey to the netherworld represents the character submerging into the unconscious (Kawai, 1996: 101). Thus, narrative protagonists such as Izanagi were journeying to the deepest realms of their psyches and not to any physical space (ibid: 103).

Kawai's perspective and results, although suggestive, have a considerable number of problems. First, affirmations about the netherworld as the subconscious are greatly speculative and lack empirical foundations. Also, differences between folktales such as "*Urashima Taro"* and the myth of Izanagi, which Kawai equates, present many differences already discussed regarding Yen's approach. Finally, Kawai, intentionally or not, oversimplifies some elements of Izanagi's visit to the netherworld to match oral narratives and folk tales. That makes Kawai claim that Izanami's journey "was accomplished without difficulty" (ibid). He disregards the chasing of Izanagi by the dead, the thunder gods and lastly his own deceased wife. Kawai also dismisses any reference to Izanagi's failure to recover his wife and the pollution

and destruction he brings to this world. Thus, we must conclude that these academic approaches to netherworld journeys in Japanese narratives have not convincingly explained EBT narratives. Nevertheless, both Yen and Kawai do note a relevant aspect of the EBT theme: their persistence throughout time and media. As Kawai argues, themes such as the netherworld journey have been a constant in Japanese traditional texts as well as in other media such as Noh theatre (Kawai, 1996).

The Conversation in Modern Japan

After the process of the modernization of Japan (1853-1912) the theme of death in general and EBT narratives in particular have been profusely represented in a variety of forms. However, after the country's transformation it is worth acknowledging a question in vogue at that time: the oppositions of tradition and modernity and western and originally Japanese themes and motives. Regarding such controversy Gwenn B. Petersen argued that "even the most innovative writers have turned to earlier tales for theme and character" (1979: 17). He draws such conclusions from the study of authors like Akutagawa Ryunoskue, Tanizaki Jun'ichiro, Mori Ōgai, Mishima Yukio and many others up to the mid-1970. His argument is then that culture and context deeply influence the work of such authors, their approaches to the themes a manifestation of the intertextual cultural traditions. Such persistence of traditional themes has, however, been

altered by the incorporation of modern or foreign elements that caught the authors' attention.

Therefore, it is hard to speak either of a pure Japanese tradition or of a modernized or westernized Japan. What modern Japanese cultural utterances present is a blended product in which a combination of these opposites is heterogeneously combined (Petersen, 1979: 17). In other words, after Meiji, the literary repertoire used by Japanese authors presents a complex set of foreign and indigenous elements that includes tradition and modernity unequally. But also, the categorization of cultural constituents as foreign or indigenous might vary through time, author or discourse.

Going back to the EBT theme in the Meiji era (1868-1912), the period seems to have presented a hiatus - at least until the turn of the century - not only of that traditional long-standing theme but also with regard to death in general. It was with the passing away of the Emperor in 1912 that different authors started to consider their own mortality, the end of the times and the finitude of everything (Fukuchi, 1993).

There are some exceptions in Meiji, however, but they are few. In *Koto no sorane* (*The Empty Sound of the Koto*), Sōseki Natsume (1904) wrote about ghosts that, although thought to have disappeared in Meiji, persist in fascinating him. However,

for the theme of EBT narratives the work by Sōseki that presents more relevancies is *Yume jūya* (*Ten Night Dreams*) (1908). In it the author addresses a man who faces the death of a loved woman. Sōseki's story introduces a fair number of differences from traditional EBT as the main character not only refrains from any taboo breaking but also accepts the separation of death (Napier, 1996: 47-48). In Sōseki's tale a male character contemplates a young beautiful woman dead after she makes him promise to wait one hundred years by her grave. He buries the body and waits until one day a plant stems opening its petals. The man kisses the flower seeing a single white star twinkling in the sky. Therefore, the character in *Ten Night Dreams* witnesses a metamorphosis considered positive for the contention of the man and his favourable response to such transformation (Napier, 1996: 48). Napier also argues that such transformation clearly represents that a dead or dying woman is inherently passive and unthreatening for the male who can now control her (ibid). However, in Sōseki's story it is not the man but the female who directs the metamorphosis and it is she who directs him in the required operation (ibid: 49).

Sōseki was not alone in his attraction to the afterlife and supernatural explorations. Contemporary authors such as San'yūtei Enchō (1839-1900), Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) and Shiga Naoya (1883-1971) explored the dimensions of ghost

representations in literature and transformation through modernization (O'Neill, 2002: 4). However, these investigations were not so much centred on the dimension of ghosts as representatives of death but on their relationship with the fantastic in opposition to the scientific. Nevertheless, the mainstream rationalist landscape of Meiji was already showing signs of the presence of dissonant voices that opposed such rigid scientific thought. It was through such gaps that explorations on fantasy, death and the supernatural would follow the questioning of hegemonic discourses as modernity and scientific progress.

Death reflections appeared again two years after Emperor Meiji passed away; in Sōseki's most famous novel *Kokoro* (1914). Death is not the main theme of the story, however, one of the most studied passages of the novel deals both with death and suicide. In such fragments Sensei - a student during Meiji - discusses the death of the Emperor, the suicides of general Nogi and his wife - who killed themselves aiming to honour samurai ethics - and his own (Bargen, 2006).

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Sōseki's aim was to talk about death regarding the afterlife or unresolved feelings of attachment – most now agree that he was discussing the death of the the "Spirit of Meiji" (Fukuchi, 1993). Through the character of Sensei, Sōseki explores deep generation gaps between those who grew up during Meiji and their feelings once the era ended with the

Emperor's passing away. Therefore, although Sōseki's novel does not directly touch upon the theme of EBT or netherworld journeys it continues the interest in death, ontologies of death and dying and the social and cultural systems operating around it. And its relevance is even greater if we consider such interest in death will increase in the next decade, especially after the collapse of Taishō's (1912-1926) ethical and moral system (Hiroshi, 2004).

Three years after *Kokoro* an example of death as the main theme can be found in Shiga Naoya's short story *Kinosaki nite (At Kinosaki)* (1917). In that novel Shiga presents an eloquent meditation on death (Petersen, 1979:19) in which he tells the story of a near-death experience that took him to rest in a rural inn of Kinosaki. Away from modern and urban life, Shiga meditates on different aspects of death and afterlife possibilities from reincarnation to nothingness and quietness. It is also relevant for this study how, instead of referring to any religious text *At Kinosaki* introduces literature to relieve the pain from an approaching death (ibid: 48). Such recurrence to literature starts a trend that will continued in the next decade in Japan (1920s). But it also reveals the importance that literary and fictional texts began to have for the relief of death once scientific explanations and religious narratives failed to ease the minds of those facing death.

During late Taishō and early Showa (1920s and 1930s) an interest in death lead to its exploration in different dimensions, suicide especially, received increasing attention with variation on the themes and authors' approaches (Hiroshi, 2004). As in *Kokoro*, recurrence of suicide was in vogue during this period. One of the main examples is Akutagawa's *Shinkiro* (*Mirage)* published in 1927, the same year as his suicide. As with Nogi, Akutagawa's act left a strong impression on his colleagues (Hiroshi, 2004).

On the one hand death and suicide were considered by authors such as Dazai Osamu in *Banmen* (1936) or Hori Tatsuo in *Sei kazoku* (*The Holy Family*) (1930) as a white screen on which to project themselves for further inspection (Hiroshi, 2004: 36). Thereby, their aim was to be able to explore death, life and their whole selves as only the end of their existence could allow. For that reason, some decided to experience death through fiction (Hori) while others directly on themselves (Dazai who attempted suicide three times). Death is thus seen as an escape from our limited means of perception, constrained by our body, our mind and our own existence. There is an aim to investigate the conflict of "the depicting self" and the "self which is depicting" through concepts such as the "third death" or the partition of the self into multiples to experience one's existence (Hori, 2004: 53). These afterlife and death explorations were aiming for the

epistemological possibilities the liminality of death has to offer (ibid). That was an idea shared by most authors as can be seen in Kobayashi Hideo *X he no tegami* (*A Letter to X)* (1932) or Yokomitsu Riichi's *Junsui shōsetsu ron* (*The Discussion of Pure Fiction)* (1935) and the existence of the fourth person as "the self perceiving the self" (Hori, 2004: 43).

Such trends of self-exploration through death and suicide declined after 1936 when the militarisation of culture started to oppress literary manifestations. Death was then channelled into a new aesthetic cult after the outbreak of war (Hori, 2004: 44). This approach led some authors to accompany the troops to war to gain a first-hand experience. These alterations polarized the depiction of death under the influence of nationalism and militarism also affected by the left that were forced to convert to such ideals - *tenkō* (Takaaki, 2008).

Hori's study bears two main significances to this project, although he does not discuss the EBT itself. First, he shows a renovated interest of writers in the theme of death after the Meiji lapse. It also points to a deep relation between thematic trends and contextual changes. Hori links the renovated interest on death due to contextual changes. Hori explains the widespread of death narratives based on the failing of Taishō's Japan ethical and moral system (Hori, 2004). Therefore, as Mizuno (1975) argued, literary or artistic trends and themes are greatly related to the

cultural and social context in which they are crafted. Thus, the abundance of a theme should not be considered a coincidence but a manifestation of worries and interests of a culture with regards to the surrounding world (Hori, 2004: 41).

Coexisting with this attraction to suicide we can find the writings of Miyazawa Kenji (1896-1933) an author whose work received little attention before his death (Hagiwara, 1992: 241). Nowadays both his poems and fictional works are taught in school in Japan and have even been represented in manga and anime. This project's main interest is in Miyazawa's discourses on the netherworld, death, life and the fantastic, themes that greatly interested him in his last works. Like many authors in Japan who mix tradition with modernity (Petersen, 1979), Miyazawa has been labelled as an ultra-modern and yet ultra-primitive author (Hagiwara: 1992: 245). He is ultramodern for the way he embraces modern scienctific findings, especially Einstein's relativity theory while he addressed animism, shamanisms and the Buddhist doctrine of transience and relativity of the world (ibid). But different from traditionalist or nativist writers, also interested in such aspects of Japanese culture, Miyazawa's understanding of these matters goes to a scale of billions of years before him as well as to primitive cultural manifestations. Miyazawa goes beyond the main traditional texts or sacred scriptures tracking his own interest to a primordial time, an

arguably cosmic universality. One example is *Ginga tetsudō no yoru* (*Night on the Galactic Railroad*) (1934) in which a boy journeys into the galaxy combining modern technology with shamanistic flight and ancient animism (Hagiwara, 1992: 246).

Miyazawa's fictional works aim to create a pleasant tension between life and death, this world and the other (Hagiwara, 1992: 255). The two realms seem to be not far apart as the breach that separates both is more an appearance than a reality. Both states' boundaries connect them, turning one into the other before realization, as in a Möbius band (ibid).

Such connection between this world and the other derives from Miyazawa's escapism from this world as it is - which allowing such a withdrawal (Hagiwara, 1992: 257). A strong tone of dissatisfaction can be found in several of his works making every mundane stimulus fantastic and uncanny. Compared to Shiga's *At Kinosaki* (1917) in which death reflections maintain the reality of onomatopoeic sounds, Kenji's worlds alter by their connection even the most quotidian sceneries (Hagiwara, 1992: 260). The netherworld is thus so much in this world as vice versa. However, contrary to later authors such as Mishima Yukio and Kawabata Yasunari, Miyazawa's main interest resides in death transcendence and the belief of an afterlife existence.

After the Pacific War (1941-1945) previous themes regarding death and suicide persisted in what has been classified as Japanese postwar nihilism (Petersen, 1979: 23). That label helps to differentiate between the goals of authors in the 1920s and 1930s who explored death with epistemological aims and the new approach from postwar authors deeply rooted in a nihilist sentiment. To fully understand the dimensions of such nihilism it is necessary to acknowledge Japanese attitudes towards suicide as deeply influenced by a variety of traditional approaches to suicide such as the samurai code or Buddhist life and death conceptions (ibid: 24).

It was only four years after the end of the War when Kawabata published his book *Yama no oto* (*Sound of the Mountain)* in which the main character, Shingo, profusely discusses death and the netherworld. As in Shiga's *At Kinosaki*, it is nature observation that triggers the protagonist's reflections on death and netherworlds (Hagiwara, 1992: 258). Shingo then refers to his dreams in which he has a sexual encounter with Shinshū, his deceased sister in law. Shingo's dreams are then connected to death and the netherworld, where he desires to be reunited with a woman he still loves despite such separation. Kawabata shows in this novel a deep attraction to the other world as in Miyazawa's fictions (Hagiwara, 1992: 258). However, Kawabata presents a

different treatment of nature which is neither as fantastic as Miyazawa's nor – as we will see in the next paragraph – as artificial as in Mishima's (ibid). Kawabata's aim is to see a different world both behind and beyond nature imbedded in Japanese nativist sensitivities such as *mono no aware*.

But the most representative writer on nihilist attitudes towards traditional death and the samurai code was Mishima Yukio. Death in Mishima bears some complexities, although there is agreement on the remarkable sexual and masochist dimensions of his death reflections (Hagiwara, 1992: Hughes, 2000). Thereby Mishima sees death for its function as the only way to resolve all contradictions of the individual and its existence in this world (Hughes, 2000). Suicide allows the transcendence of one's own identity. However, Mishima's conception of the netherworld is problematic as his mentions are scarce and obscure. For instance, in *Tennin gosui* (*The Decay of the Angel)* the protagonist meditates on the netherworlds' nature by looking at a leaf on a spider web and comparing it to a door to other possible existences. Such a passage does not tell us much about netherworlds in Mishima but rather focuses on his representation of alienation in this world and the elusiveness of the other (Hagiwara, 1992: 257).

But the main literary postwar example of EBT interest in Japanese culture is by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō. In his short story

Yume no ukehashi (*Bridge of Dreams)* (1963) Tanizaki addresses the decadence and demise both materially and metaphysically of a Japanese family as the father decides to bring home a woman identical to his deceased wife. The disturbed psyche of the father goes so far as to ask his son to call the newly arrived woman his biological mother and to reproduce the same acts and behaviours he had with his mother, including breastfeeding from her. We find here a clear example of Bronfen's argument that "the double enacts that if what has been lost return, nothing is ever lost" (1992: 52). From that very moment the family starts to undergo a process of sickness and pollution that is transmitted to their bodies. Socially outcast by the community, they finally disappear or scatter around the country in a permanent state of death and loss non-acceptance.

We there find a reference to *The Tale of Genji* explicitly made in the title *Bridge of Dreams*, the same as the last chapter of the Heian narrative. But the reference goes beyond as Genji too "restlessly seeks to replace his dead mother in a series of new lovers" (Napier, 1996: 43). Thereby, Tanizaki's *Bridge of Dreams* not only presents the first most explicit example of EBT in literature in postwar Japan, but also makes a clear reference to traditional ancient Japanese texts.

Later, in 1983, the theme was mentioned in Murakami Haruki's story *Tony Takitani* and in the film adaptation (2004). As Tony

loses his wife in an accident he decides to hire a woman physically resembling her, just to ask her to wear his wife's clothes and stay at home. Both finally understand how wrong what they were about to do is and refrain from such behaviour. As in Tanizaki's story, we find the theme of life and death boundaries, but it is arguably not the main one. In Tanizaki's it is at least a main one shared with the theme of incest while Murakami's includes a wide number of themes and motives that are as relevant or even more so than life and death for that story. Nevertheless, they show the enduring interest in such narrative themes, its presence and recurrence linking those ancestral narratives to the period of the lost decade (1990).

Contemporary Japan: Everything Solid Melts into Air

The 1990s opened in Japan with a feel of mourning for the death of emperor Hirohito. Almost simultaneously the country was shaken by a wide economic recession that has lasted for more than two decades. During this crisis rose questions about the government, and later every institution and their capacity to deal with it, protect citizens and maintain the peace of postwar times. A deep sense of the end of an era and the undetermined, undefined new times to come reigned in Japan (Kingston, 2010). Furthermore, the crisis was aggravated by two main events that

shook Japanese society and culture: Aum Shinrikyō terrorist activities and the “Young A” incident in Kobe.

Heisei Recession: Questioning the Iron Triangle

The tumultuous period of the Lost Decade abruptly began with the sudden burst of the asset bubble of the 1980s (Kingston, 2010: 23). Banks were buried under bad loans imploding the economy as the self-confidence prevailing in the 1980s gave way to the anxieties that came to permeate all societal realms. The 1990s also marked the beginning of the end of the general middle-class society narratives prevailing since the 1960s (Chiavacci, 2008; Chiavacci and Hommerich, 2017). The dissolution of the social equality that had characterized discourses of Japanese uniqueness lead to a fundamental social polarization and exclusion of increasing parts of the nation (ibid, 22). As Kingston argues, the discourses of Japanese as a cohesive and unique group were replaced by the mantras of deregulation, decrease of government intervention and the emergence of a society of “winners and losers” (2010: 17). New conceptualizations of self-responsibility and individual risk rose within the challenges of globalization as the government shrank its domestic role of looking after every citizen (Hook and Takeda, 2007: 94). A tendency that also aimed to reduce the state responsibilities towards families in need. Invoking self-responsibility (*jiko sekinin*) the Liberal Democratic Party

government reduced support for families just as more of them were in greater need (Kingston, 2010: 6). On the citizen side, deep distrust widened and prevailed as they perceived the failure of Japanese leadership, increasing reliance on the family and civil society for critical support (Avenell, 2010: 195). That feeling of political failure and carelessness was then aggravated by the government's negligent response to the 1995 Kobe earthquake (Kingston, 2010: 28-30).

1995 Disasters: Kobe Earthquake and Aum's Terrorism

In 1995, a 7.2 on the Richter scale earthquake devastated the city of Kobe causing 6,200 deaths. Almost a third of the whole city was destroyed leaving thousands of families without a house and nowhere to go (Iida, 2000). The situation was aggravated by the slow and inept response of both municipal and central governments (Kingston, 2010: 29).

The response and aid came from the non-governmental society, more than a million students turned up from all over the country while the yakuza opened the first kitchens for the survivors (Kingston, 2010: 29). This reinforced the sense of community as non-profit organizations helped to coordinate the volunteers, playing a crucial role on the relief of the desolated communities. But the earthquake had an unexpected consequence, fostering the attack of terrorist group Aum Shinrikyō in Tokyo fuelled by the group guru's schizophrenic paranoia (Iida, 2000: 440).

Aum Shinrikyō was a major religious cult established in 1984 obsessed with apocalyptic narratives. It was then, after the Kobe Earthquake that the group's "science minister" suggested the seismic activity had been caused by US experiments (Iida, 2005: 440). Shōkō Asahara then called to take up arms in a war directed against the Japanese state and the US. This war of Armageddon fanaticised the leader and a group of followers who decided to follow the path of violence fulfilling their war narratives. Part of that group under direct orders of its messianic and supreme leader committed a series of indiscriminate attacks in Tokyo's underground train using sarin gas, killing and injuring more than 5,000 people (Iida, 2000: 426; Kingston, 2010: 29). The news spread across the country deeply harming the myth of Japan's internal security. Meanwhile, the cult's narrative was discovered to understand the attack on the underground to be the opening of an attempt to take control of Tokyo and then the whole world. The mission of Aum was to purify the spiritual decay spread around the world inaugurating a new era lead by "psychically-gifted" individuals (Iida, 2005: 239).

A similar feeling of the failure of the government to secure the safety of the people once again spread around the country. The Japanese could not understand the ineffectiveness of its government, the police and the institutions that guaranteed the internal security of the country. This unsureness and disbelief

lead many to accuse the government of dereliction of duty (Kingston, 2010: 30) making it the target of many angry, scared, anxious and frustrated citizens. But for the nation itself it was time to analyse how that could have happened. How had the cult attracted so many talented youths? And overall, what was wrong with 1990s Japan?

To answer these puzzling questions some decided to analyse and explore the cult itself. One of the main characteristics of the cult was its sense of fictiveness (Iida, 2005: 239). Aum recurrently used narratives and symbols from anime, manga and computer games which were combined with their own appealing fantasies. But what was most alarming being the high number of students and young adults attracted and enrolled in the cult. However, the violent acts were performed by an almost insignificant proportion of the group's followers.

The cult was, however, not only built on appealing narratives. It was also established on solid institutional and material foundations with numerous income sources and a clever systemic structure. Science played an essential role in its development as the group's belief was constituted around a hybrid of occult religion and scientific rationality (Iida, 2005: 241). Its complex metaphysics combined empirical understanding of human bodies and emotions which were in turn, used to justify the guru's power. This "truth of Aum" subordinated everything

and everyone to the sacred project of Armageddon which, in turn made the cult victim of its own paranoia.

Finally, the idealization of war narratives and superhuman power surpassed the gentler side of the retreat into spiritual life, satisfaction with emotional lack and a space for a second chance to mature (Iida, 2005: 242). The attraction of a communal life with a group that gave a static and unquestioned metanarrative appealed a generation of broken links with the family, the community or the nation. A filling of the void two decades of intense materialism had widened was addressed by the cult spiritual narratives (Kingston, 2010: 30).

But the internal peace Aum offered vanished as the media and the State fell upon the cult condemning it for its violence. Aum was eventually stripped of its official status as a religious legal entity and early the following year was declared bankrupt marking the end of Aum although leaving serious doubts about the State's capacities to maintain the domestic peace and security. A deep fear lingered as the population remained insecure about the capacities of the authorities to effectively prevent future similar tragedies (Kingston, 2010: 30). Public mistrust haunted a Japanese government already in a crisis of credibility.

Eventually such distrusts permeated into popular culture, including works in manga and anime as both media have exhibited intense fascination with the Aum incident itself. Early responses presented variations on the trope of an evil cult with Aum as the model for marginal religions depicted as “hotbeds of sexual depravity, fraud, and violence” (Thomas, 2012: 127). However, later in the decade less sensational psychological thrillers questioned those human nature aspects that allowed for such behaviour.

On the first category, there is Yamamoto Naoki’s *Believers* (1999). From page one *Believers* deals with a world of a fictional religious movement with early hints of its doctrine and antagonism to secular society. On the other hand, Urasawa Naoki *Nijūseiki shōnen* (*20th Century Boys)* (1999-2006) presents a more complex narrative (Mori, 2005; Yoshida, 2005; Yamada, 2014: 160). The story centres on a group of children who discovers a cult-leader and his plans to destroy the world during the 1990s and early 2000s (Thomas, 2012: 134). Finally, Ohba Tsugumi and Obata Takeshi’s *Death Note* (2003-2006) deals with the construction of a cult obsessed with a mysterious and hidden leader, Light, this time the protagonist of the story.

This overview shows how Aum as a source of horrific thrills gradually retreated from popular memory (Inoue, 2012). The various discourses addressed differences between religion and

"cults" influencing popular interpretations of the role of religion in post-Aum Japan. Works like *Believers* were, for their immediacy to the incidents, unambiguous in their critique not only of Aum but of "cults" in general combining them with religion (Thomas, 2012: 146; Yamada, 2014: 156). However, such an approach is related to Yamamoto's career of examining the darkest side of group dynamics. Urasawa, on the contrary, shows a more complex distinction between religions and "cults", despite the stereotypical portrayal of the leader and the "evil cult". It, however, explores the responsibility of the cult followers, their complicity and perpetuation of twisted world views (ibid). These manga provide closure with the Aum incident and the pushing of those horrors to the margins of collective memories. They, somehow served or aided to understand, make sense and face the national trauma post 1995. Nevertheless, a final blow to the last remaining pillar of postwar Japan security would come only two years after Aum's attacks to the underground of Tokyo.

Children are Turning Strange: Kobe's "Young A"

The "Young A" of Kobe was a case in which a 14-year-old boy from an ordinary family was arrested for committing a series of attempted murders and two successful murders (Iida, 2000). The boy carefully planned the murders in advance and committed them cruelly and calmly (Iida, 2005: 234). One of the victim's head was mutilated and left in front of the school gate with a note

declaring the beginning of a “game” with the “foolish police” as “a revenge against the school system” that has transformed him into a “transparent being” (ibid).

Eventually, as the police were unable to resolve the crime, the boy turned himself in to them. During the investigation, he explained his motivation as a “sacred experiment” testing “the fragility of humanity” (Iida, 2005: 234). Indeed, he had been fascinated with killing, as he tested first in insects, then animals and finally humans. The event shocked Japan not only for the ordinary origins of the boy but also for his uncanny motivations and behaviour as well as his defeat of the police as a synecdoche of the “adult world” (ibid: 235).

The frustration about the kid’s obscure motivations eventually led to an array of debates around remedies to anti-social behaviour. The murder, however, was not lacking a “true cause” but one so uncanny, complex and sophisticated that it still puzzles Japan today, fostered by an elaborated poem left as a confession. Some have read in it a sharp sense of doubt about life as a self-evident fact and death as less evident (Ōsawa, 1997: 226). That doubtful second category is what attracted the boy, troubling and fascinating him into a state of extreme anxiety (Iida, 2005: 236). It is this disturbed mind a representation of the split between an empirical selfhood and consciousness as the latter aims to dominate the former far beyond the subject’s control. Thus, “this

monstrous consciousness emerges” from the emptiness of existence fixed to the mystery of “the human condition and who desperately seeks to “resolve” it” (ibid).

Overall, the “Young A” case represented the deep problems harassing some of the pillars that have maintained the image of Japan as a peaceful crimeless society. This also raised questions about the family system, the relations between parents and their children, the school-system and even more abstract concepts. Among these, perhaps the questioning of finite and infinite categories, the stretching and questioning of boundaries and the aim to answer them is what bears most relevance for this study.

Socially, the “Young A” case lead Japan into an uneasy feeling of deep uncertainties. Violence represented in an extreme and horrendous form did not come now from a group of terrorists as in 1972’s United Red Army’s activities or from cultist fanatics (Perkins, 2015). The case was now more challenging as it came from a young ordinary child from a middle-class ordinary family. To understand the bewilderment of the nation we need first to comprehend that children in Japan have been an object of added value as metaphors (Arai; 2006; Yoda, 2006). That means that children have become symbolically charged with significance as representations of other values such as nature, purity, innocence or a pre-cultural state (Arai, 2006: 216).

However, in the decade of the 1990s “the child” became in Japan the nexus site of intensified of social anxiety (Arai, 2006: 217). A phrase spread around the country: *kodomo ga hen da* (children are turning strange) representing a larger discourse of social malaise, crisis and collapse with “the child” at its centre (ibid). In that climate, the ‘Young A’ Kobe incident shook the country. Although there are no other examples of such brutality the event resulted in what sociologist Hirota Teruyuki called “a serious problem” (1999: 179). Much was then debated leaving a complex relationship between the power of the trope of childhood and the anxiety surrounding the figure of the child (Arai, 2006: 232). The movement of the discourse reconfigured, and still does, the location of the child in a context of crisis and deep uncertainties. This unsureness permeated popular representations with especial influence on visual products such as manga, anime (Iida, 2005; Arai, 2006) and computer games.

This incident also permeated discourses and questions regarding the family especially the role of the mother (not so much the father) in contemporary Japan (Yoda, 2006). In that direction, conservative writers such as Hayashi Yoshimichi or Ishihara Shintarō have argued that the child and youth issue in Japan is motivated by the loss of authority and power of the father. A restoration of the values of the father, they defend, represented in prewar Japan would grant a return to discipline,

law and objectivity. With regards to the “Young A” most of the focus was directed on the mother, on her role as supervisor and mentor, almost equating the child’s troubles with maternal failure (Yoda, 2006). But again, the children’s problems were understood as a metaphor, blaming the supposed Japanese matriarchy and its flaws for all the problems and chaos of postwar Japan. This focus, however, not only seems a way to place the responsibility away from the father, but it also presents a patriarchal opportunism to reinforce the male. In any case, what these questions show is an intense interrogation of the place of the individual into greater entities such as the family (Yoda, 2006).

Debates became even more vivid around the formation of groups and group mentalities in the early stages of life, childhood and adolescence. The repetition of mediatic cases of bullying and suicidal tendencies among kids and teenagers deeply alarmed the nation (Aspinall, 2014). The debate then centred not only on the family but also on the school, the formation of clubs and groups during this formative period. Mainly this discussion developed between two poles: the necessity to foster individuality and creativity; and the benefits of maintaining values as loyalty, group harmony and belonging to a greater entity than oneself. These debates were thus intensely intertwined with discourses about selfhood and the traditional tendencies to stress the group over the individual (Cave, 2007: 13). Therefore,

calls to defend individuality were not just aiming to modify academic curricula but also to change the Japanese notion of the self (Aspinall, 2014: 242).

These debates around childhood and the general anxiety widening in Japanese society were eventually addressed by popular media. Especially, these worries were a central theme in Kon Satoshi's anime *Mōsō dairinin* (*Paranoia Agent)* (Figal, 2010). Elements from daily life such as the role of media, gaming, youth violence, child molestation and bullying were mixed by Kon with fantasy and thrills (Perkins, 2012: 126). The anime centres on a group of characters affected with fear or anxiety who are suddenly attacked by *Shōnen Batto* (Young Batter) and knocked unconscious. Eventually, the viewer discovers *Shōnen Batto* is a product of the anxiety and fear of one of the main characters who, as a child, was unable to cope with the responsibility for the death of her dog. *Shōnen Batto*, a mysterious violent kid is then collectively reproduced and used by those experiencing the pressures of society's demands and impositions (ibid: 126).

Tension, loss and communication in a consumerist society are interrogated and emphasized throughout the anime. Technologies and their relation to human interactions are questioned by Kon who, from a modernist humanist position, worries about lack of spontaneous encounters in a world of rationalized and mediated communication (Perkins, 2012: 127).

The medium is then the monster; comprising the electronic media technologies that are part of mass-delusional consumption (Figal, 2010: 140). Eventually, the disappearance of less artificial and technologically mediated interactions become central to semiotic and existential issues. People became alienated from their emotions, feelings and deeds perceiving them as strange and threatening, and they responded by reaching for something external to take them away (ibid). It already happened with the metanarrative turn regarding the Pacific War in which Japan changed from aggressor to victim. However, this time the uncertainty seemed greater and the discursive resources were dimmer.

Overall, the 1990s presented different challenges that deepened the individual insecurity at the same time they reinforced the need for a group or communal response. Tensions between the constitution of individuals, groups and their relations were questioned as previous forms of communal organizations (nuclear family, religious communities, local and state governments) were now under intense ontological scrutiny (Miyadai, 1997; Koschmann, 1993; Asada, 2000). These debates about the pushing of boundaries, concerns regarding the constitution of the self and the construction of new and different forms of communities would eventually permeate every cultural form. And, as the same issues remained in the following

years, popular culture joined the conversation reflecting the permeation of these worries and the incorporation of the whole nation in these debates. Now with propositions represented through the innovative communicative vehicle of new media.

Ancient Themes,New Media

Since then, the EBT has continued to appear transferred to new media such as manga, anime and computer games. It is from 2001 to 2011 that this theme not only appears much more profusely but it gradually becomes the main structural theme of new cultural manifestations. Examples of such transference can be widely found in Japanese popular media during that time frame from manga and anime. The EBT in the Second Lost Decade started in the manga *Chobits* (Clamp, 2001), and anime *Chobits* (Clamp, 2002), *Sankarea* as a manga (2009) and anime (2012), *Noragami* as manga (Adachitoka, 2010-) and anime (Tamura, 2014) to computer games such as '*Ni no kuni'* (Level-5, 2010). Let's expand on each of these products' relation to EBT narratives.

The first example of the list, *Chobits* presents the theme of male non-acceptance of the death of a female character but not at as a main theme of the story. It is through a secondary character who makes a robot to supplant his deceased sister that EBT is mentioned, this being the first example of this decade. However, the theme of EBT will grow in relevance as can be seen in the

manga *Sankarea*. In it a high school student manages to resurrect a girl he likes after she is killed by his father. But Furuya, the main protagonist, is not the only character obsessed with the girl's death, but also on Rea's (the deceased girl) father whose reluctance to face his wife's death brings him to an incestuous relationship with his daughter similar to *Bridge of Dreams*.

In the medium of computer games *Ni no kuni* presents the story of a child who loses his mother in an accident early in the game. However, immediately after, he discovers that there exists the possibility to revive her by traveling to a contiguous netherworld: the *Ni no kuni* – or second country - a term that resembles the *Ne no kuni* of ancient Japan. *Ni no kuni* is however a game in which the adventures throughout the netherworld and the boy's attempts to revive his mother are projected in a cheerful positive way. The boy even manages to solve in his quest many of the crises that appeared around this magical realm and to bring peace to polluted sacred places.

In addition to these engagements there are three texts that have been selected as the sample for this PhD. They all were designed during the Second Lost Decade and have the EBT as their main structural tension. The first of these discourses is Arakawa Hiromu's *Hagane no renkinjutsushi* (*Fullmetal Alchemist*) (2001-2003). *Fullmetal Alchemist* develops around the idea of bringing life to those passed away. The story begins as the main

characters - the Elric brothers - attempt to break the first taboo of their world and bring back to life their deceased mother. Arakawa's work constantly reinforces the negativity and utter dangers of transgressing the separation of life and death.

Therefore, in *Fullmetal Alchemist* the blending of life and death is not only the main theme but also a recurrent obsession on the different characters. The EBT is constantly permeating the narrative bringing deeply disastrous outcomes. Such an example is relevant for the deep and wide development of the theme through its 27 volumes and for being the first narrative of this timeframe to be mainly dedicated and centred on the transgression of death and life separations.

The second text, the anime *Hoshi wo ou kodomo* (*Journey to Agartha*) was released in Japan in 2011 by the acclaimed director Shinkai Makoto. As in the previous example, the main theme of this anime is the transgression of boundaries between life and death, this time by a male teacher. He has been researching the possibility of traveling to the netherworld by studying the *Kojiki* and similar texts. Accompanied by a female student, the teacher aims to regain the soul of his wife by journeying to a land that is both far away and contiguous to this world.

Finally, the last material under study is the computer game *Wanda to kyozō* (*Shadow of the Colossus*) (Ico Studio, 2005)

released between the previously mentioned products. The story begins when a young warrior carries a deceased young woman to a forbidden land to commit a forbidden act. Such transgression of the boundaries between life and death is the main threat the studio aimed to explore, as they stress in their website (https://www.jp.playstation.com/software/title/bcjs30071.html).

The game's multimodality adds a level that none of the previous media have: interactivity. Through a textual reading of the player's actions, the relationship and experiencing of the story and therefore the transgression is enhanced and appreciated in an engaging and performative manner.

As this chapter has argued, the interest in the EBT and, most generally on death has fluctuated in Japan depending on its contextual cultural, social and historical circumstances. From the *Kojiki* to the Second Lost Decade the centrality of discourses and interrogations on death and afterlife has varied showing, in the early years of the 21st century a new relevance. However, the juxtaposing themes, motives, worries and concerns of the contemporary context are as relevant as the permanence of an EBT structure. Therefore, this chapter has provided an overview of the different approaches to the EBT theme throughout history to conclude with the social and cultural worries of the context immediate to our sample. Now, with a better understanding of both the EBT and the conversations of contemporary Japan it is

time to study our sample's approach to the theme through its medial capacities.

Chapter II. Transgressing Boundaries: Exile and Loneliness

This chapter studies how the EBT theme is narrated through the modes of the language of manga. After having reviewed the EBT throughout Japanese history and media this chapter opens this PhD study on contemporary engagements on the theme. It is my argument that the overall treatment of the EBT in new media has approached the theme as a vehicle to discuss not only universal ontological and existential concerns but also contextually specific worries. This chapter, and the following ones, not only identify which motifs are intersecting the overarching EBT but also how they construct a meditation on key issues in contemporary Japanese culture. For this specific chapter I argue that the EBT in *Fullmetal Alchemist* (*Alchemist*) links and intertwines both universal and specific concerns. On the one hand, it discusses the ethics of being and becoming, a historically recurrent ontological concern. On the other hand, *Alchemist* situates these dilemmas within debates on the organization of family, gender, power relations, ethnicity and identity and, perhaps the main one, a questioning of progress and scientific and material development. Therefore, the EBT is considered a dynamic construct used to discuss through its abstract form and nature the hopes and worries of 21st century Japan.

In this regard, this chapter describes, interprets and then analyses the representation of these different debates through the medium of manga, how its language constructs the themes and the inferable meditations on both content on medium. This relationship is studied in *Alchemist,* a manga which ran from 2001 to 2010. The selection of *Alchemist* is based on two of its main characteristics: first, the work of Arakawa Hiromu has been a huge success in Japan expanded to create a wide crossmedia franchise. The franchise not only includes the series of 27 volumes of the manga but also two animated series *Hagane no renkinjutsushi* (*Fullmetal Alchemist)* and *Hagane no renkinjutsushi: furumetaru arukemisuto* (*Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood)*, as well as computer games, animated movies and a variety of merchandising (Hernández, 2013: 266). The second reason for choosing *Alchemist* is the relevance that the EBT theme presents for the development of the storyline and the main dramatic tension. Arakawa's manga was the first of popular new media products that gave the EBT a central role in the story. The theme is, thereby, not only present but paramount to the manga's narrative being recurrently discussed by the characters. Thus, *Alchemist* stands as one of the major examples from new popular media culture that discuss and explore the EBT theme.

This chapter thus interprets and analyses the way *Alchemist* as a manga addresses such negotiations on life and death by the

characters and their world. For that reason, this chapter is divided in three main sections. First section presents a brief introduction to the manga medium, its ontology and phenomenology. That is, its nature and how it is experienced. It deals with definitions and characteristics of the medium, what it is and how it works. The second presents an outline of *Alchemist'*s storyline, the context and relevant information regarding the author and the franchise in general. Then I narrow the analysis to how the EBT is presented and developed through the narrative as the core of the story aiming to better understand the way Arakawa addresses it.

The second section presents a study of the EBT in the manga. However, considering the length of the manga the analysis is focused on the Elric Brothers' transgression, which is mainly represented in three scenes. Nevertheless, references to other relevant transgressions from other characters are discussed as they influence the protagonists' quest and the overall discussion of the EBT. With that aim I propose a selection of methods that focus not only on the content and narrative of comics and manga but also on the construction of it through their visual languages.

Manga, Ontology and Phenomenology

Manga is a cultural phenomenon elusive to define. From its description as Japanese comics to studies on its particularities the understanding of what makes manga what it is, or even what manga is remains up to heated debate. Even apparently evident

descriptions of manga as sequential art raise doubts and exceptions (Johnson-Woods, 2010: 1). Not all manga is sequential, and there are arguments about it not being art. According to Toni Johnson-Woods manga “is a visual narrative with a recognizable “sensibility””, being the term sensibility intentionally vague to cover multiple options. Not all manga looks the same, some follows the Disneyesque style of Tezuka Osamu, others depart from it.

While manga can be considered to fall into the wider category of comics it differs from Western-style sequential narratives enough to maintain its specific category. But the argument on what it is that makes manga so different remains inconclusive. The most evident is that manga follows a Japanese reading orientation from back to front and right to left. Some argue that the main difference is that manga focuses and revolves around one main character whom the reader follows throughout her/his adventures (Cha, 2007). Others add that manga aesthetics present a multitude of graphic techniques that might blend on the same page (Johnson-Woods, 2010: 5). Words tend to be fewer than in Western comics, relying more on visual cues, cinematic techniques such as ‘freeze’ or ‘close-up’ frames. It is also populated by sound effects with onomatopoeia using the katakana alphabet.

More phenomenological approaches have aimed to comprehend how manga is experienced to understand its ontology. On this regard Mary Grigsby (1998) and Daniel Pink (2007) have explored the relation between pictures and words combined and how these are read. Pink, a developmental psychologist has researched how eyes and brain work together to process complex stimuli from the mixture of words and images found in manga. From his results Pink argues that manga readers' eyes travel smoothly throughout the page rarely stopping at the text (ibid).

Furthermore, studies on manga readership and visual language have been focused on linguistic researches. One example is Neil Cohn, who develops Frederik Schodt's (1983) argument that manga is another language with unique grammar. Manga uses a wide variety of frames, highly detailed backgrounds and simplified abstract characters. This, according to Scott McCloud (1993) increases the reader's identification with the character, it distances it from the background and makes it pop out more. At the same time, a greater grade of realism while representing some characters would help to objectivise them, separating the reader and affecting her/his relation to it.

Cohn develops his argument from manga writers who considered their medium a language, drawing similarities with any other symbolic system (2010). Tezuka was one of the first to argue that

manga was another language, with its words, sentences and sequences (Schodt, 1996: 26). Cohn thus proposes that the visual expression of concepts, when put into sequences, is a form of language (2003; 2005). Sequential drawings organised by a rule system comprise a visual language that binds and connects readers and authors in a common visual linguistic community (Cohn, 2010: 187). Manga applies a socio-culturally situated language, one that Cohn defines as Japanese Visual Language (JVL). What is it and what characterises it?

JVL, and furthermore, its standardised version, uses icons as basic signs. Iconic signs are then combined with those indexical and those symbolic (Cohn, 2010: 188). Iconic signs resemble, or aim to, what they mean, although both coding and decoding are influenced, if not conditioned by, the cultural landscape in which they are situated. On the other hand, indexical signs convey meaning through indicative or causative relations, they point to what they mean or represent. Symbolic, on the contrary, express meaning only through cultural agreement, such as words or traffic road symbols. However, these categories are not rigid as their boundaries can blend or even present mixed signs.

In JVL, the signs discussed here, are, with some punctual exceptions, drawn in a way that favours their recognition. This forms particular styles and archetypes. It, as most languages, reaches this category by cultural negotiation and agreement. The

patterns created become recognisable by a community's use of the common models it proposes. JVL vocabulary gathers from historical, social and cultural traditions transmitted from other sources and media (Cohn, 2010: 190). It is, therefore, a human-made construct, a product that, therefore, allows variety, a polyphony of different visual voices that move within the system, pushing or reinforcing its boundaries. There is, consequently, a common and consistent vocabulary that allows for understanding by new and veteran readers while leaving room for innovation or variation.

On regards to the main structure and components of manga, its basic element is configured by individual images that can be arranged in frames, or panels. However, a singular panel can contain a variety of images and therefore, a sequence. It is, nevertheless, from the construction of more complex sequences that the narrative of manga fully develops. The system that configures and organises that narration is the grammar of manga's language. Sequential meaning is subtracted from the organisation of the elements inside the panels and between them, depending on different panel transitions (McCloud, 1993: 70-72). Panels can also combine to build larger structures or "narrative phases" (Cohn, 2007). Thus, one of the key manipulations of comics is the construction of time through space, as it is through the dimensions of the panels, the elements in them present, how

they are organised and the transitions between both panels and pages what constitutes a specific experience of time. This narratological aspect is key to comprehend the way the medium and its tools are used by the authors to communicate, and how they do so. It is then through the understanding on how the pages are crafted to be read that we can comprehend the authors' approach to the medium, but also their engagement on the EBT theme and conversation. Thus, by a close-reading of the medium's representation of the EBT it is possible to study manga's language in use and its content and engagement in an intertextual conversation.

Methods for the Study of Manga

The study of the EBT in manga requires a combination of methods for its critical analysis. What I present in this section is the eclectic approach to a very concrete theme, the transgression of life and death boundaries, and a specific text, *Full Metal Alchemist*. The focus and study of the text is structured in three main stages. This comes from Peter Coogan's proposed methods that begin with multiple readings of the selected sample (2012: 208). The first stage refers to a reading that aims to replicate the experience of any implicit reader while it familiarises the researcher with the text itself, the events and characters. The second reading requires a deeper engagement with the text. There are different ways to conduct this stage, in my case I note

down the presence of the EBT, where it appears, its frequency, the relation with other themes or its spatial and chronological characteristics. I also identify the characters that are related to it, and how it is discussed. The last reading refers to a set of different examinations of the text. It requires multiple readings of concrete scenes. In my approach, once I have identified which are the most relevant scenes for my study, I select the more appropriate and begin the close reading and the thick description of them.

Although there is a variety of features and elements to focus on while studying manga they can be included in two main sections: the construction and manipulation of time and space, and the arrangement of its visual and verbal elements, or its *mise en scène* (Coogan, 2012; Singer, 2012). Both are, however, connected, and their sequential study should not be confused with a separation or a linear experience as they occurred and are experienced simultaneously. Therefore, time and space are constructed, manipulated and altered through the arrangement of the perspectives, the elements in a frame or the combination between words and pictures (McCloud, 1993). This has an impact in the way the manga is read, how it works to transmit a message or to create a particular experience. But it is important to focus not only on what happens inside of the panels but also in between and around them, their sizes, forms and relations with

the rest of the page. It is relevant, as well, to focus and pay attention to the relation between pages, how a page starts or ends and how it connects with the rest of the manga. In summary, in this third reading I pay attention to elements such as the art style, the panel size, shape and arrangements within the panel, page layout and transitions, angles or perspectives, the pacing, the inking lines and their various thicknesses, the use of onomatopoeia, the placement of word balloons (Coogan, 2012: 208) and any other features that give relevant information about how the medium speaks about the EBT.

As said, this third reading leads to the study of both narrative (construction of time and space) and the mise en scène, simultaneous and intertwined phenomena. To comprehend how they operate in a manga, Thierry Groensteen (2007) proposes a detailed exercise of intermedia translation and breakdown. This approach focuses on the operation of the sequence, of the arrangement of inner elements to the panel, the perspective, the frame, but also the relation between panels and pages. This exercise consists on translating every panel of a page (or a scene) into linguistic terms, not leaving any relevant information for the comprehension of the scene. It is necessary to write a text that reads as fluid as possible. This exercise thus shows the key elements of a scene, those features that make it intelligible and primes what an implied reader would have to focus on to

understand the action. Later, more detailed descriptions can be added as we deal with transitions, time manipulation or more specific arrangements of the features present in the page (ibid: 113-119).

Once this translation is finished, I can then focus on the narrative sequence and the chrono-spatial manipulation of the scene. In this regard, Marc Singer (2012) proposes an approach to time and narrative in which he focuses on the construction of alternative systems of time and how they are represented through the sequential art of comics. To do so, Singer argues, it is important to consider how the medium's language shapes its representation of time, the techniques that simulate the passage of time and the spatial and sequential relationships within and between panels (ibid, 59). These arranged elements construct different time lines connected to discontinuous images and scenes and other nonlinear practices, what Groensteen calls braiding (2007: 146-147). This variety of time representation and its arrangement and manipulation throughout a series thus requires further examination for its relevance regarding the use of the medium's narrative tools (Singer, 2012: 59).

But as mentioned before, time and narrative are composed and subtracted from the arrangement of the various elements present in the panels, the page and the whole series. Form, as Pascal Lefèvre argues "is anything but a natural container of content in

the comics medium; form shapes content, form suggest interpretations" (2012: 71). *Mise en scène* concerns the representation of a scene through the organization of its elements. It is then related to the concept of framing, referring to the choice of a perspective and the borders that contain that image (ibid). Understanding both the framing and the *mise en scène* are key, as they introduce and develop the statement that the manga is articulating through its language and tools (Davies, 2005: 190). While drawing a scene in manga, the author has to make different choices such as graphic style, perspective, framing, combination of verbal and visual elements, the breakdown of the story in panels, their interaction, page layout and many others. Every present element is a choice, a decision constrained by a range of norms coming from principles of its medium (Lefèvre, 2012: 72). Thus, a scene is represented by a specific organisation of its visual elements, and that structure has been chosen for its communicative possibilities and potentialities. It is a key aspect of the manga that requires attention, for it will be through it, through understanding how the scene is organised to be read that I extract what it is that is aiming to communicate, to transmit. These are, therefore, the main methods that guide the analysis of the EBT in manga, methods that focus on the expressive capacities of the medium and in *Alchemist*'s engagement on the conversation.

The Story of Fullmetal Alchemist

The story of *Alchemist* is extensive and complex not only for its content but also for the way it is revealed to the reader. Therefore, for a reason of clarity I present the narrative in the chronological order in which it occurs, not in the way it is discovered in the manga.

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The king of Xerxes fearing death decided to use alchemy in order to gain immortality. He used the “homunculi”, an ethereal presence created by an alchemist who experimented with the gate to the netherworld, the “Gate of Truth”. The king ordered the making of the “Philosopher’s stone” which requires human lives. It allows the resurrection of the dead and immortality among other powers. The homunculi, however, themselves became a philosopher’s stone now with the physical appearance of Van Hohenheim (a slave) swallowing the souls of all Xerxes. Only Van Hohenheim survived, becoming a philosopher’s stone.

Centuries after that, the Homunculi reached the kingdom of Amestris seizing control over the military and starting a series of campaigns to expand the kingdom following their plan to create a bigger transmutation circle. Van Hohenheim becomes a major alchemist and starts a family. He leaves his home, to stop the

Homunculi. But in his absence Trisha (his wife) passes away leaving behind their two promising alchemist children Ed, and Al. They decide to break the major taboo of alchemy, resurrecting the dead. The brothers do research about human transmutation using their father's books and notes. The experiment, however, is a complete disaster. Al is sucked into the "Gate of Truth" opened by the circle. Ed loses his leg and then trades his arm to recover Al's soul.

The brothers start searching the Philosopher's stone to get their bodies back. Eventually they find out the truth of the stone, and that many others have been tempted or even tried human transmutation, such as their teacher, a housewife called Izumi who tried to revive her son. Finally, after a huge battle with the other homunculi the brothers manage to defeat them saving the country. It is then that Ed manages to get back Al's body in exchange for his alchemic powers after refusing to use their father's immortality.

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One of the first conclusions from *Alchemist's* narrative has to do with the complexity of the fictional world Arakawa has created. That includes the development of the characters and their arcs, both deeply conflicting and full of incoherencies, just as any human would display. Arakawa thus avoids any simplistic or

stereotypical presentation of the heroes, their assistants and antagonists. On the formal characteristics, the intricacy of the content is emphasized and maximized by a complex use of the visual language of the medium. Therefore, the next section focuses on the EBT in the manga through its content and language.

Life and Death Transgressions in Fullmetal Alchemist

One of most salient characteristics of EBT in *Alchemist* is the recurrence of the theme throughout the series. Arakawa's manga introduces a conversation within a polyphonic narrative in which different voices engage in this transgression and its consequences. It is the aim of this section to explore the conversation in *Alchemist* and its representation by the medium language. Here I believe is pertinent to discuss three concepts from Mikhail Bakhtin that guide my theoretical approach to these texts: polyphony, dialogism and heteroglossia (1984). These three terms are intertwined and help us to build on conceptualization of the EBT conversation, especially in fictional works.

These concepts come from Bakhtin's narrative analysis and are related to the construction of discourse and to the conversations within a culture. But they are interrelated too. The first term, polyphony means "multiple voices" and is used to express the

different voices unmerged into a single perspective, not subordinated to the author's voice. They have their own validity, perspective and narrative relevance in the novel (Bakhtin, 1984). The second concept is dialogism, referring to the recognition of the multiplicity of voices and perspectives that can exist even in a single character. And, finally, heteroglossia relates to the combination of styles and voices which comprises a novel (ibid). They are assembled into a structured artistic system with multiple perspectives represented by each, which act as exteriorizations of these approaches.

The combination of these concepts allows for the study of two distinct levels of the EBT conversation. The first level refers to the intertextual relations in which *Alchemist* is inscribed; that is, the voice that this product adds to the debate. It thus adds a particular approach to it shaping the discussions of such theme. On the other hand, the second conversation, also polyphonic is the set of discussions inside of the manga. In other words, *Alchemist* is populated with a world of characters that have their own voices, opinions regarding the EBT and they present them in the debates within the manga. These are the elements that construct the overall discourse that *Alchemist* presents and the outcome of their conversations construct the manga's particular participation on the EBT.

Nevertheless, in the fictional world of *Alchemist* the EBT is represented in a particular way, with its own origins, development and consequences. Therefore, although the opinions and different voices are relevant, this fictional world proposes its own activation of the netherworld, its singular conditions and inhabitants, its situation and consequences. Then, apart from how each character might consider or regard the act of trespassing, this act has some elements shared by everyone. It is this common and collective EBT, which *Alchemist* constructs above and beyond its inhabitant's opinions, that this chapter focuses on. In this chapter I present a study based not only on the content but also on the form, the combinations of both and the result of their intersection. The analysis is based on the study on the way the EBT is organized and presented by the medium. In other words, how the features, modes and tools of the medium are used to engage on the EBT conversation.

To do so the section is divided into three main subsections corresponding to each main scene in which the EBT is the centre of the debate. These scenes are: 1. The first mention and account of the brothers' transgression; 2. A full and complete narration of their EBT and; 3. The end of their journey to return to their state prior to their offence. These scenes are selected for the relevance of the development of the EBT and the different visions and understandings within the manga and its characters.

The First Scene

Time, Narrative and Sequence

The most outstanding characteristic of time and narrative structure concerning the first EBT scene is that it is mostly told through a flashback, both in the first and second scenes. That includes the reasons for committing it, who they were trying to revive, the ritual and the consequences. The use of a flashback repeatedly to situate such a major event to the narrative outside the timeframe of the narrative has some consequences relevant enough to be discussed before their description.

First, it seems relevant that Arakawa introduces a feature of traditional Japanese cinema narratives: flashbacks (Thompson and Bordwell, 1976; Desser, 1988: 17). According to Desser there are three main narratives in Japan: classic, modern and modernist (ibid). Classic narrative time is chronological, episodic, cyclical, mythical and/or transcendental. The modern paradigm is chronological, causal, linear, historical and individual. Finally, in the modernist narrative time is achronological, arbitrarily episodic, acausal, dialectical, anti-mythic and anti-psychological and metahistorical. The first manipulation is of temporal structure, typical of Yasujiro Ozu's films, decentring narrative. Important events are thus learnt indirectly, through ellipsis at crucial moments or flashbacks (Thompson and Bordwell, 1976: 45). However, Arakawa's work differs from Ozu's and traditional films in the audience lack knowledge of the characters' past, present

and future (Desser, 1988: 18). The uncertain and unknown are one of the main characteristics of *Alchemist*. This is stressed in the marked differentiation between events of the same timeline and flashbacks and the recurrence of the same moment being told in order to add unknown features about the brothers' EBT. Therefore, in time structuration *Alchemist* would be a pastiche, a combination of different types of Japanese narratives: traditional, modern and modernist.

The whole scene's sequence is organized in three sections (see Appendix). The first part corresponds with Cornello's speech. In it, the priest discovers the brothers' marks of EBT pollution. This serves to introduce their transgression and it is done stretching the time of the scene building the tension up. This finally leads to the second chapter of the series and the second section: Al's narration of their EBT. This second part corresponds to the main event of the scene in which the EBT is for the first time introduced and explained. It is, however, extremely succinct, only a justification of why they did it and the consequences it had for them. The last part is a returning from the flashback in which both brothers accept their wrongness and explain their opposition to the breaking of the essential taboos of their world. However, there is a relevant element left alone from the EBT which is the failure to revive their mother. This event is told, again through a flashback, ten pages after in a separate scene.

The main question of this scene regarding time and sequence refers to the reason for telling the EBT story for the first time through a flashback. First, the scene sets a feature that would be repeated: the chronologic timeline is not strictly linear, narrating past events in the present. That has an immediate effect on the reception and presentation of the story. First, the EBT is explained whenever the transgressors or other characters decide, not chronologically situated. This gives more autonomy to the characters as they decide when, what and how to tell it. It also, and it might be one of the main explanations, allows the brothers' origins to be a mystery, a shadow that hangs over them maintaining tension for the reader. The author can then manipulate time, the presentation of the facts and how that is being done.

There is another key feature from the narration of the EBT in this first scene. First, it is the transgressors who tell it. They can then manipulate the presentation of the event and add or omit information. Second, the conversation regarding the journey to the netherworld is situated around and about a narration of its experience. The EBT is not framed as an objective event but as a tragic and dramatic event. Third, there is a level of justification to the narrations; the Elrics try to share their motivation and the cosmologies and ethics behind their taboo-breaking actions. However, there is also the feeling of accepting their fate, their

wrongness. On the other hand, the Elrics present a determination to purify themselves even if that means losing their lives.

In any case, the most salient feature of this scene is its function as an introduction to the brothers, their journey, background, aims and characteristics. There is a key feature of manga and the construction of the characters pointed out by different theorists (Koike, 1985; Miyamoto; 2011). These authors argue that in most, if not all manga there is the tendency to construct protagonists that stand out from the rest of the characters. To do that *mangaka* (manga writers) use different features such as including the name in the title of the series, giving them special physical or metaphysical characteristics including powers or differentiated behaviours. Such is the case in *Alchemist,* as the very title exemplifies. Following this method to make the character noticeable Ed presents different characteristics such as his short stature, red cape and mechanical limbs. Al too is represented distinctly as a vintage suit of armour, with an outstanding helmet and big dimensions. Interestingly, these characteristics come from their EBT, more specifically from the pollution they bear. And there are some clues from the *mise en scène* that confirm this understanding.

1. 2. The mise en scène

In manga, perspective, framing and representation of characters or events are not done exclusively by visuals. Verbal elements

such as onomatopoeia, captions or speech balloons can also be used to express emotions or construct the scene (Lefèvre, 2012). Indeed, in *Alchemist* this use of both verbal and nonverbal manga attributes are put into emphasizing and remarking on the mechanical attributes of Ed and Al. And, as was mentioned previously, these characteristics are marks of their pollution, so they act as constant reminders of their transgression and of their aim to purify themselves.

In the first part of the scene, there is a panel that emphasizes the use of these elements (see Appendix). The way words and image relate in the reading sequence (its order) parallel and complete each other. That is: the order in which the text is read coincides with how the images would be read. The effect emphasizes and centres the attention on Ed's mechanical arm concealing his eyes with the effect of portraying Ed as inhuman, priming whatever makes him a machine, or a monster. This feeling is emphasized by the accompanying speech with Cornello's comments on Ed's title: 「鋼の錬金術師」 (Fullmetal alchemist) (Figure 2.1). Again, the name of the character and its use for the title of the series is a way to make it stand out in the manga (Miyamoto, 2011). To sum up, the pollution the brothers bear and try to purify accompanies them in different forms: physical, verbal and metaphysical. This reflects the debate about what, socially

and culturally, defines the limits of humanity, a recurrent debate in the conversations within the manga and the EBT conversation.

Figure 2. 1. Rose witnesses Cornello's judgment of the Elric Brothers

The second part of the scene, the flashback, aims to reaffirm the importance of the pollution from the EBT. It also includes the reasons and the determination of the brothers, acting as a justification of their actions. Al's account focuses on explaining why and how they were polluted and lost their physical presence. Their focus is so intense on that topic that they forget, or decide not to talk, about what happened to the being they tried to resurrect.

Therefore, the main point of the first mention of the EBT can be equated to some of the stages of the EBT narrative structure: the origin of the transgression, pollution and its result. However, the whole journey to the netherworld, whatever happened in there and some other major parts of the transgression are missing. Nevertheless, in the second telling of the EBT, this time by Ed to his teacher Izumi, the manga presents an extended and more

complete explanation and presentation of how the journey happened, its development and consequences. That corresponds to the second scene to be commented on here, which focuses less on the pollution and more on how it was performed, as well as on the ontology of the other side, of the journeys between words and the aftermath.

The 2nd Scene

As was the case in the first scene, the second time in which the Elric's EBT is represented takes place through a flashback. However, this time the scene includes some features that make it seem like an unmodified narration, in contrast with Al's intervention from the first scene. In other words, if in the previous scene it was clear that the EBT was narrated, modified and conducted by Al and his discourse, this time it is shown as it happened, unchanged and to its full extent.

But perhaps the most relevant element is the representation of two new spaces in the EBT and in the world of *Alchemist*. The first is the liminality in which Ed encounters Truth, a significant character for the series, and the Gate of Truth which grants access to all knowledge and information. The second space is beyond the Gate where knowledge is stored. This scene is key to both *Alchemist* and the understanding what it proposes regarding the EBT. It is the first time that the relation between the EBT and knowledge is established as problematic. This

conceptualization is studied and discussed in this section, although its outcome is completed in the last scene.

Time, Narrative and Sequence

One of the main characteristics of this second scene is that it completes the narration of the brothers' EBT summarized and introduced by Al in the previous scene. The narrator, it is worth mentioning, seems to be Ed, who apparently has a wider and more detailed memory of the events triggered by the transmutation. However, perhaps the most salient feature of the whole scene is the feeling impregnating it of being a narrative external to the Elrics'. That is, the information included exceeds the epistemological capacities of either of the brothers. As can be seen (Appendix), some events told in it happened without the presence of Ed (the narrator) or Al. Although it can be questioned if they really happened that way, they are coherent with the rest of the plot of the manga. Therefore, it seems that the flashback is either an exact account of the Elrics' EBT or, at least, a combination of Ed's memories with elements beyond his epistemological capacities. This representation is further stressed through the narrative sequencing of the scene.

In this regard, the flow of time is presented mostly within the flashback, what in narratology has been defined as mimesis: "a realistic imitation of the world" (Singer, 2012: 56). Therefore, story, in this case, is almost equivalent to discourse, as the

manipulations of the representation of time are minimal (Genette, 1980: 33-34). This has further implications to how the EBT`s polyphony in *Alchemist* is displayed. In the first scene, the stretching of time and its compression, in other words its alterations, were made by father Cornello to create a particular mood, an environment propitious for his intentions. But now, the mimetic representation of time aims for the opposite: a clear, exact and smooth fluid time, faithful to the events it is telling. The expression and narration pretend to share an unaltered account of how the EBT elapsed. The phenomenological output aims for a pure experience, a feeling of actually witnessing the brothers' offence.

Such pretended effect is aided by the inclusion of elements, events and situations around and related to the brothers' EBT that exist outside their cognitive capacities. It is, for instance, in the very first page where the appearance of a squawking crow situates the narration outside the limitation of Ed's memory (see Appendix). The crow, a clear symbol of a bad or dark omen, presents the scene as it happened, not just as it was experienced by the protagonists.

But the appearance of the crow, first squawking, then flying over the house (Fig. 2.2) is not the only sign of how complete and first handed the narration is this time. In fact, the main indicator that the story surpasses the Elric comes on the last page. In it, Truth,

is presented isolated, in that empty liminality, and discovers that Ed is going back paying his arm as a fee. Ed is not yet there and we are not told about what happened, although closure from the intertextual relations within the plot has already advanced the result. In any case, that last page serves to indicate what has already been hinted at since the beginning of the flashback: although it is Ed who tells the story, the manga presents what happened, not just what the narrator remembers. This feature is stressed through the *mise en scène* of this fragment.

1.2. Framing and Scene Visual Construction

One of the most salient characteristics of the framing of this scene is the disparity each page presents regarding its layout and the inclusion of ambiguous panel construction. Through this scene we can see Arakawa's use of the manga's formal capacities to make puzzling and surprising narratives. For instance, the page that starts with Ed's lifting the scroll and exclaiming 「できた！」"I've done it!" is still part of the previous scene. It is later in that page where an establishing shot of a crow flying over the house opens a new scene, as its formal construction stresses (Figure 2.2). This symbol sets the emotional tone of the scene anticipating the dramatic result of the transmutation. Although the brothers remain in a good mood, the scene has completely shifted with the crow symbolizing that turning point. The situation has worsened presenting a parallel

relation between the brothers' emotions and the risk and danger the action is presenting. In other words, the closer to the transmutation the happier the brothers and the more perilous the situation is.

Figure 2. 2. *A bad omen overflies the scene*

The second characteristic of this narration is that it is made to stand out from the rest of the flashback in which it is inserted. In addition, there are three separated sections in this sequence that correspond to different stages of the transmutation: preparation; journey to a different plane (liminality and beyond the Gate) and return to the physical plane. Each of these is marked by an establishing parcel that uses the perspective and organization of

the elements to differentiate this stage from the rest. This intensifies the feeling of estrangement as the reader experiences the movement between different and separated worlds. Here, the establishing shots introduce a new space, a main new event increasing the tension and bewilderment of the reader.

These images all have the same angle (high), the same organization (a central element to draw our attention). But most importantly, they all abruptly introduce an event without further explanation. This way they maintain both interest and tension following a structure of: shocking new element, explanation of the situation and final resolution that leads to the following section. The best example of this might be the first appearance of the Gate of Truth (Appendix 1 and Figure 2.3). The Gate allows humans to travel to the deepest inner plane where all cosmic knowledge is stored. And, as we can see, the elements inscribed in the Gate are deeply mysterious for different reasons. First it is a symbol uncommon and mostly unknown in Japan (perhaps even in Europe where it comes from), Robert Fludd's (a 17th century Paracelsian scholar) the "Sephirothic Tree of life"; second it is written in Latin, a strange language for many Japanese readers; and last of all the Gate is supernaturally placed floating in the nothingness (Figure 2.3).

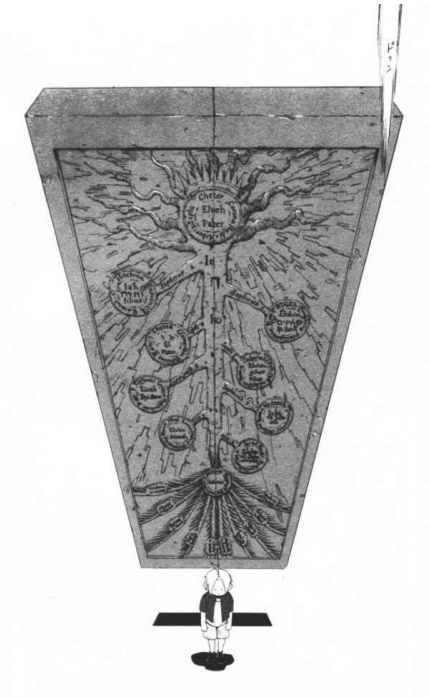

Figure 2. 3. *The Gate of Truth and its uncanny characteristics*

The other one-panel pages reproduce the same structure and function. But a last note remains: the significance of the journey that Arakawa is proposing in this scene. To understand what this scene is representing let's focus on the elements in it and how they are organized. First, Ed and Al are represented activating a transmutation circle that summons (accidently) forces that would devour them. Then Ed is represented alone, without his brother in a liminal empty space with just an enigmatic figure called Truth. It has the shape of Ed and claims to be the whole cosmos and also Ed himself. It is the gate keeper and sole resident of this place. His voice, as the speech balloons reflect, is supernatural, not coming from where he is and resonates differently from other speech (Figure 2.4). Then, as he finishes speaking the Gate

opens unchaining the same forces that once sucked in the Elric brothers.

Figure 2. 4. Truth's inhuman speech

Now Ed is inside the Gate where he witnesses the origin of all knowledge, from the beginning of the universe to the future. Incredible amounts of information are transferred to him as he loses part of his physicality. And it is then that he sees what he came looking for: his mother and how to revive her. The scene ends there, with Ed at the brink of reaching her hand (Figure 2.5). Ed, in the next page appears again at the liminal. He had failed as the hands aiming to hold represent the knowledge and power to resurrect the dead. Power he lacks. Now Ed must pay with part of his body and is expelled to the world of the living again. What can we make of this scene? What is it telling us about the EBT?

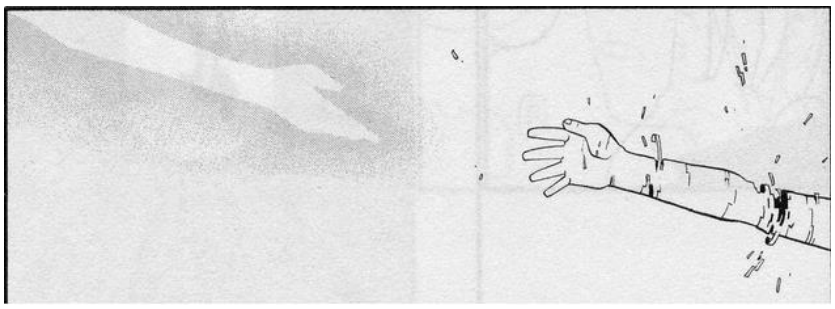

Figure 2. 5. Ed is incapable of reaching his mother.

Arakawa seems to incorporate in his understanding of EBT psychoanalytic approaches to these narratives. These interpretations as it was commented in the introduction of this study explain the journey to the netherworld as an introspection, an inner trip to our psyche (Kawai, 1982). This is motivated by our mourning and longing (Freud, 1976) a perilous consequence of our incapacity to deal with loss and the pain it produces. And there are several elements that can support this psychoanalytical understanding of *Alchemist*'s EBT. First, Ed and Al are separated after the dark forces are activated. They are transferred to different spaces instantly where there are only two elements: Truth and the Gate vary from person to person (as we discover later on). It seems, therefore, that the journey the Elric activated with their attempt to revive their mother is a physical manifestation (with consequences) of their incapability to deal with that loss.

What seems more original and interesting for *Alchemist* participation in the EBT conversation are the different elements of this trip relating to the transgressors' psyche. First, the EBT

tempts the protagonists because of their intense mourning and loss non-acceptance. There, the Elrics' agency disappears as the EBT takes over them, controlling their fate. But the representation of what the EBT originates and the possibilities it opens up is perhaps one of the most original proposals by *Alchemist*. First, it is related to knowledge, that is quite plain to see. But the innovation resides in how knowledge is acquired and stored. Each individual, according to *Alchemist*, possesses in their deeper core all the necessary knowledge, and the learning means to discover it. It is not external word observation but an inner introspection that grants power to alchemists and humans in general. Knowledge might be stored in the outside world but just as an expanded uncompressed version of the cosmos we all have contained within ourselves.

But here knowledge also relates to the rules of the EBT as Ed's actions in the physical world testify. As Ed returns from his journey he decides to bring Al's soul back. He now understands how to do it and that a fee is required. All that he learnt from his trip. However, there are still epistemological gaps: he is unsure about how much he must pay, what had happened to Al, or where he is. This reinforces the impression that although Ed has come back with a better cosmic understanding, some essential gaps remain. And these are related to essential information such as how to succeed in resurrection; the exact fees to pay and, finally,

the fate of his own brother. Nevertheless, as the end of the Elrics' journey tells us in the last scene, all these questions would be resolved in the final fragment from *Alchemist* that I discuss here.

The 3rd Scene

The last scene to be studied and discussed from *Alchemist* is the climax that ends the journey. The resolution of the conflict surpasses the limits of this scene. The remaining information is scattered around the last scenes of the manga. As has already been commented upon, *Alchemist* tends to insist on the key points of the story to ensure their comprehension. Both the visual and verbal elements are thus combined aiding for the understanding of these key parts of the story. In any case, this scene contains all the information needed to understand how the EBT purification journey ends and its consequences.

Overall, the scene has two main parts: the conversation between Ed and Truth and the recovery of Al. This is the first scene regarding the EBT that takes place at the same timeframe of the rest of the story. Being this its first main characteristic let's focus on time and sequence, and how it is presented in this scene.

Time and Sequence

The last scene related to the EBT deals with the termination of the brothers' journey aimed for their purification. This scene is the first time the EBT and its solution is treated in the same timeframe as the rest of the story. Since this is not a flashback

nobody is framing or manipulating the story. It has this peculiarity but, also, it confirms some of the remarks pointed out in regards to the second scene. Moreover, the peculiarity this time is that none of the results are known by the reader, as was the case in the previous scenes.

This last scene is the first time the result of the EBT is unknown, as it happens in the present of the story. Ed hints before journeying to the netherworld about his intentions regarding what to sacrifice to save Al. However, the result of that attempt is unknown; the appropriateness of the fee Ed is willing to pay unconfirmed, creating new tension around his journey for the reader. Thereby, the main feature is its novelty in relation to the rest of the EBT and furthermore, to how the scene is narrated.

Arakawa has thus presented a structure that maintains the elements to be found in other stories with such theme: unacceptance-transgression-pollution-purification. However, in *Alchemist* the pollution is prolonged through the whole series with references to the beginning of the transgression. The brothers' punishment is always present, reminding the protagonists of their rebellion as they seek purification, an aim that drives the story forward.

Regarding time construction, this scene aims to prolong the action in order to maintain and even build up the tension. This

makes more sense keeping in mind that this is the peak of the quest's climax. In it the EBT is going to be resolved while the outcome is still unknown. This means that suspense is a key feature of it as Ed can either succeed or fail. Here, time is manipulated through the chronotopic separation of the speech-balloons (Figure 2.6). There is then a feeling of time being stretched, with the action lingering, being paused and constantly filled with silence. The main aim is thus to keep the tension of the unknown result of the EBT quest for purification.

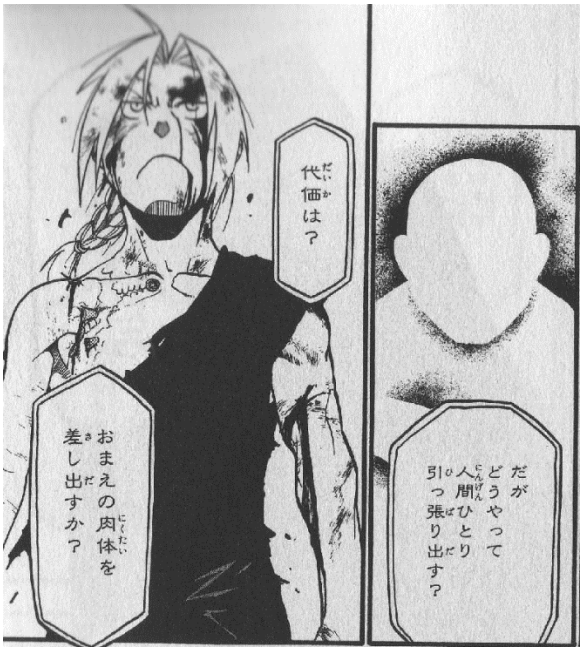

Figure 2. 6. Ed pauses before the Gate building up the tension

This tension is first addressed by Ed explaining his resolution to Truth: he is going to trade his powers, represented by the Gate, for his brother. He seems sure of his success as his shifted attitude shows, from tense to relieved and happy. Still, it has to be Truth who confirms if that is possible or not. Ed is asked if he

understands what that means and he answers by presenting his view regarding that the knowledge and powers obtained through alchemy. His aim is to recover his brother but also, he realizes how poorly alchemy has helped him in the past. He could not save his little friend Nina, transformed by her father into a monster using alchemy. This reference stands as a synecdoche of their journey: alchemy is power and thus danger; it requires a strict discipline and a sane moral mind. Sadly, he has discovered all that after committing EBT. It even seems that Ed's journey parallels his quest for purification with his realization of the dangers of alchemy in the wrong hands, including himself (the civil wars, the near- destruction of the whole country and so many others).

But what does Ed offer to counterbalance the void alchemy will leave? In the last sentence to Truth, and the final remark that seems to convince him of Ed's maturity, Ed states the relevance of something he did not see before: community. Ed makes a reference to all the people who could have helped him to overcome the pain of loss and all the aid he received to succeed, to purify him and Al (Figure 2.7). It is this understanding of the reincorporation to the group that makes the failure of a rite of separation (Trisha's funeral) into the success of a rite of reincorporation. We thus can observe two things: the separation rite, aimed to bring the Elrics back with the living, was reversed.

In other words, instead of departing from the dead to rejoin the community, the Elrics departed from the living to join the dead. That is confirmed and stressed by Ed's eventual separation from his brother in the last battle. Thus, Ed being lonelier than ever after Al leaves him he understands the need he has to belong again to the community (friends, family, neighbours). This is the turning point of the purification journey. In that moment of utter abandonment Ed understands the relevance of others and the perils of the isolation that inner journey provoked. But he knows how to solve it. He destroys the attraction of the Gate (and what it represents) to trade it for the reunion with his brother. Ed justifies himself by stressing the relevance of others and the uselessness of the extreme introspective individualism on which he has depended for so long.

Figure 2. 7. Ed gives up on alchemy for something greater: belonging to the group

Now, in the manga that event is fostered and accompanied by Truth's encouraging words, disappearing with the Gate, not

before pointing to Al's body. Time in this climatic moment is aided in its construction by the way the balloons and the utterances contained in them are organized. His last word leads the resolution of the journey with the rescuing of Al. Moreover, this final word, in Japanese the termination 「だ」, serves to end a sentence and here, the whole journey (figure 2.8).

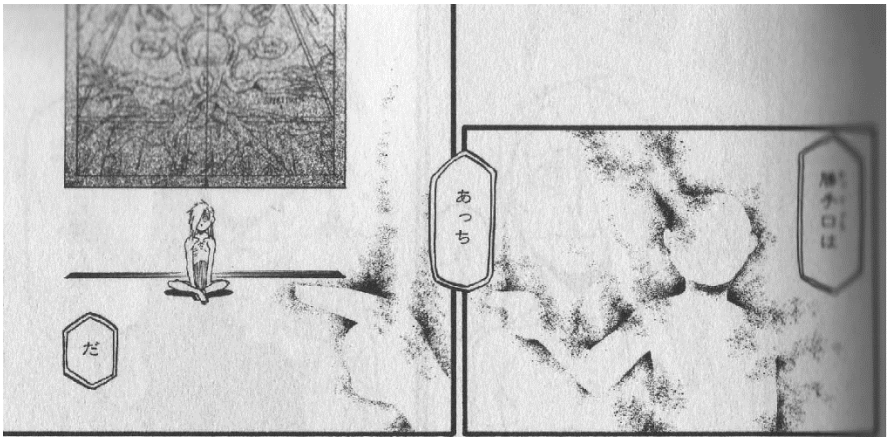

Figure 2. 8. Visual and verbal synthesis

This is an interesting combination of words and images as they seem to be cooperating in the construction of a verbal and visual sentence, perhaps one of the most innovative uses of the medium in the three scenes. Here, the use of both essential elements of manga's language as well as their organization is not accidental. This is a key moment for the series and the EBT journey: finally, the brothers' succeeded in their journey; but not only that, they are led and aided by the same punishing powers

that originated the quest they are now helping to end. It is in these two panels where Ed finally meets his brother as he has wished since their failed transmutation. This relevant scene that these two panels contain is, perhaps, one of the most salient uses of content, form and message transmission in *Alchemist*. Let's see how innovative it is from the point of view of the arrangement of its formal capacities.

Mise en Scène

As it was the case of the narrative construction, the use of manga's features emphasises Ed's shift of attitude and power. The organization of the only three elements of the action are situated to stress Ed's empowerment in contrast with his first visit to the liminality. Ed is now sure of what he has to do and how. He is certain of his success over a world that he now controls and aims to vanish. Ed no longer needs Truth or the Gate. However, this shift reveals Truth as an ally to Ed. Not only does he confirm Ed's resolution, he seems happy that Ed has reached that conclusion and is now aware of what is important and what is irrelevant or even dangerous.

Thus, the framing now situates Ed higher than Truth and presents the Gate as something still uncanny (less than before) but not so powerful or intriguing. If the first visit to the liminality ended with Ed aiming to enter again to acquire complete knowledge, now he erases the Gate and with it any possibility of

temptation. Ed, again, is now in charge as he is the enigmatic higher element, intriguing even to Truth itself. This framing intensifies Ed's attitude and therefore his new role as the protagonist, as the source of power who decides what to do. Truth confirms the decision, but his authority seems almost irrelevant.

Now, let's focus on how the *mise en scène* emphasises these themes. First, in regards to the framing there is a feature of the way in which the angles vectorise the attention of the reader. After a dramatic and climactic moment in which Ed, in a one-panel page activates the disappearance of the Gate, the following panel presents a resting and calm Truth as he disappears. He points with his finger towards his right where, in the next panel, we can see Al and his own Gate standing at his back. Apart from the parallel organization of Truth, Ed's Gate and Al and his, the transition between panels and the reading direction is smooth and reiterated by Truth's pointing finger. Furthermore, the finger, acting as a direction marker is shown in a close-up at the same level and height as it was in the previous panel, only this time in a close-up. The hand is thus much bigger than Al but his function and interest remains just as it conducts Ed and the action towards the younger Elric who symbolizes the end of the journey. This serves at the same time to connect the action of the previous scene of the conversation between Ed and

Truth. It also shows how the disappearance of the components of that plane are allowing and permitting the showing of what was previously inaccessible. Thereby, Ed's sacrifice, symbolized by Truth's disappearance connects and even leads him to his reward: his brother, and the end of the journey.

This termination of the brothers' journey is significant for the way it is conducted and represented. If Ed and Al travelled to their inner individual psyche through the transmutation circle, if they went even deeper as they crossed through the Gate, now they are travelling the opposite way. The "back door" to which Truth refers is exactly the antipode of the Gate of Truth. Diametrically opposed to the journey inwards whose fatal consequences are already known, the brothers' use of the backdoor leads them to their friends and family, to the community. It is therefore relevant that *Alchemist* proposes as the final solution for the misery of craving and loss the aid of the community for those in pain. The Elrics realize that even though their mother has left them they are not alone, quite the opposite, through their journey they have learned and understood the laws and rules that control the world, they have met people who aided them and whom they helped too. Not only are they not alone without their mother but are now inserted in a wider community that surpasses their household.

Nevertheless, most of the features and concepts that this last scene addresses are better understood if discussed together

with the other scenes and the overall series. That discussion is presented in the next and last section, which also looks into the debates and conversations in which *Alchemist* participates.

Discussion

This last section aims to present and organize the different meditations and discussions that *Alchemist* proposes and explores with regards to the EBT conversation. Most, if not all, of them are constructed and developed as intersecting with the main theme of EBT as I further discuss in this section organized by following three main debates. These are: the place of *Alchemist* in the intertextual EBT conversation; the relation between this text and its context and; the relation between the possibilities of the medium and the content. Each of them aims to explain a particular feature and debate that *Alchemist* engages in and fosters as a significant example for the answering of the questions outlined by this study.

Alchemist in EBT Intertextuality

The manga *Alchemist,* which began publication in 2001 opens a decade in which Japanese popular culture products used the EBT theme as the core around which other motives could be discussed. Moreover, *Alchemist* has the particularity of having been developed throughout that decade, its publication having finished in 2010. It has, therefore, accompanied this Second Lost Decade witnessing other products joining the EBT conversation

and establishing an intermedial heteroglossia feeding and influencing other products. But *Alchemist* is not limiting its relations with texts from this limited timeframe. The EBT conversation has been present in Japan since its beginnings. Therefore, the first discussion I present here is aimed at studying that relation between *Alchemist* and the EBT debate. To make its answer clearer I subdivide this questioning into two main enquiries: what does *Alchemist* maintain from the original approach to EBT, from the elements and features that are present in the other texts or voices; and, what is original or new about *Alchemist*'s participation. In other words, what is old and what is new in *Alchemist*.

The main reason why I start with the EBT's persistence in *Alchemist* is that it comes from the appearance of foundational features. This means that one of the characteristics that *Alchemist* reproduces is the scheme or structure present in most, if not all, EBT participations. This basic organizational scheme is as follows: death- unacceptance- transgression- pollution- purification. Respecting this narrative scheme signifies that the most essential principles and ontological codes are maintained and agreed upon. Basically, what following this pattern transmits is an agreement with the primordial texts that discussed and explained why, how and what consequences the EBT presents.

Therefore, there are two main elements that are maintained in *Alchemist*: that EBT is both dangerous and harmful, and second, the meeting between life and death is impossible and unsuccessful. Thus, the most essential principles postulated by the *Kojiki*, maintained in the *Tale of Genji* and present in *Bridge of Dreams* survive in *Alchemist*. But this is not the only feature maintained, as this fictional world reincorporates the trope of the journey present in the *Kojiki* including the liminal as spcae, the threshold to the netherworld and its representation as a dark deeper place. In the Yamato myth, Izanagi crosses the threshold into an underground space, situated below our world and in complete darkness to recover his wife. *Alchemist* maintains the journey to a deeper location, the crossing of different thresholds and the meeting of the deceased female. However, in Izanagi's journey the allegory of an inner visit to the consciousness is much more arguable for the allegoric language of the myth. *Alchemist*, on the contrary, presents elements, discussed already in the second scene, that clarify this representation of the EBT journey as an individual, vertical and inner introspection.

The last, and perhaps most controversial, element that remains is the role of gender in *Alchemist*. As it is the case in mostly every EBT narrative (with the exception, at least, of *Aozukin*), the transgressors' gender is male, and the deceased character is a female. Now, the reason why I define this element as

controversial comes mainly from its ambiguity. It is true that the deceased is a woman, that she is in the land of pollution. However, she never commits any transgression, she is victim of a biological death (almost never is the deceased the victim of a violent act). All the responsibility falls upon the male characters who decide to break that taboo, who cannot cope with their own feelings and cravings and, despite knowing the danger pursue their harmful ambition with fatal consequences. What this tells us about the understanding of male and female roles in Japan is complex, and even more in the *Alchemist* polyphonic example.

Indeed, *Alchemist* presents another level of complexity regarding the participation of the different genders. These features come mainly from the first and main difference between *Alchemist* and previous engagements on the EBT. Until *Alchemist,* discourses on the EBT proposed either a monologue on how wrong it was or a dialogue between transgressor and authority. Now, Arakawa's manga presents a polyphonic debate and conversation within the EBT conversation the text joins. And it is in this multitude of voices, of participations in the conversation, that some relevant engagements come from female characters. The first mention of the *Alchemist* in the series comes from Rose, a follower of father Cornello who wishes for his lover to be revived. The second female related to the EBT, and a transgressor herself is the brothers' teacher Izumi. Therefore, women do not just have

a passive role in *Alchemist,* as characters to be resurrected, they are trespassers themselves, taboo-breakers and therefore objects of punishment. However, there is a key difference. First, Rose longs and mourns for her lover, but she is not an EBT committer, she is delegating (she cannot do otherwise) to Cornello and after listening to Al's telling in the first scene decides to quit on her path despite her great emotional pain.

The case of Izumi is different from the brothers' too. It is the first example of an EBT committed by a woman. However, to better understand the implications of this offense it is necessary to consider Izumi's role or social position and that of the male she attempts to revive, her son. In this transgression, the committer is a mother aiming to resurrect the son that was born dead. The punishment is the loss of the essential organs that permit pregnancy. Thus, Izumi is, as the brothers, victim of her own cravings but she is trying to give her life for her son. In a way, although problematic and proof of her own emotional inability to cope with the pain, this is an extremely sympathetic character who is willing to sacrifice everything for her unborn son. She is an excessively caring mother, and she suffers the consequences but, again, she not only pays the final price of mutilation but also continues her teaching activities explaining to the younger members of her community (including the Elrics) about loss and acceptance. Izumi's teachings emphasize the cosmological flow

of the world and the individual, the recognition of the non-transcendence of individual lives and the acceptance of nature's rule. Death is from this point of view not only not definitive, but natural and unimportant as we are one with the world and our existence is linked to the bigger flowing of the cosmos.

From this meditation on the EBT by a mother it is possible to conclude a nuanced moral sanctioning; emphasizing the positive figure of Izumi by her active role and teachings in the community. However, the difference is even more striking when compared to the opposite figure of Van Hohenheim, the Elrics' father. If Izumi's transgression was motivated by her willingness to give life to her son, which shows her extreme her dedication is to her family, Van Hohenheim's absence and abandonment of his wife not only allowed the brothers' EBT but, as the manga states, even motivated it. The EBT here serves as a vector to propose a direct questioning of the role of the father in modern and traditional household systems. Indeed, most of the fathers that appear in *Alchemist* are not only incapable but harmful and dangerous, such as the homunculi Wrath and Father and the alchemist Tucker who blends his only daughter with the family's dog, an image that would recur in Ed's memory as the third scene shows (see Appendix 1).

Therefore, *Alchemist* presents as one of its main characteristics an abundance of different voices that join and debate about the

EBT, that serve to develop this theme and link it with many others related to the usage of different traditional and modern values and concepts. This characteristic is possible because of the polyphony the manga presents, exploring different inner and outer dialogues, with a deep and complex character construction that presents contradictions, ambiguities and incoherencies enriching the narrative but also the EBT conversations. This polyphonic construction intensifies the key role of the EBT and presents it as a theme that deals not just with the relation between life and death. *Alchemist* thus breaks the thematic constrains and actualizes and maintains the ancestral worries, as well as incorporating newer themes from its context.

Contemporary Debates in Alchemist's EBT

Two of *Alchemist's* main characteristics are related to the change in which the EBT conversation is portrayed within its fictional world. These features are related to the polyphonic heteroglossia of the EBT within the manga. It is polyphonic not only for the different voices joining the conversation but because some characters are transgressors themselves. This enriches the conversation and the experiences they share. But it is heteroglossic too for the doubts, inner observations and ontological insecurities of the characters. This characterizes *Alchemist* as a complex, rich and polyphonic engagement. In previous engagements on the EBT there was a clear binary: transgressors vs opponents. In these categories, the separation

was clear between those who commit the EBT and those sanctioning and punishing them. However, *Alchemist* presents not only various characters who had committed the EBT but also some who aim to perform such transgression or who sympathize and comprehend the breaking of that taboo. In this regard, the aim of this section is dual: to historicize and contextualize *Alchemist* and to approach this text within its cultural and social background (Desser, 1988: 4).

That dual aim permits an understanding of the text in relationship to the specific context and cultural-historical debates in which it is participating. Therefore, the first section will aim to present a diachronic study of the themes *Alchemist* incorporates to the EBT focusing on their historical debate and origin. The second part then discusses the form these themes took during the Lost Decades and how they influenced both context and *Alchemist* as a consequence. This helps to situate the text in the historical conversations in which is participating. It also shows the intersection the EBT constructs with the different discussions and the result of that relation. In that regard, there are three main recurrent themes in *Alchemist* that converge with the EBT: the challenges to knowledge; the challenges to power; and the relation between the individual and the group.

Japanese Epistemology

A central event of *Alchemist* is Ed's visit to the other plane of existence where he acquires his powers and suffers the mutilation accompanying his pollution. In this trip he crosses the Gate of Truth where all knowledge is stored. There the metaphysical world is manifested and transferred to the physical paying a price as seen in the second scene. This sort of shamanistic journey refers to an introspection to the deepest part of the psyche, or a different state of consciousness (Yen, 1970). That visit allowed Ed to acquire a knowledge otherwise unattainable. The EBT in *Alchemist* is therefore profoundly interrelated with Arakawa's representation of knowledge, its use and its material manifestations through modern science. This debate in Japan took a specific form during the modernization of the country, however meditations on the role of different epistemologies can be traced to debates between Taoist and Confucianist proposals.

Both philosophical proposals came from China presenting two poles of thought which deeply influenced the metaphysic systems of Japan. Taoism inserts human beings as a small part of a vast and single natural unity: the Tao. Humanity's destiny was therefore "fulfilled by immersion within the flows of existence, the "One" (Morris-Suzuki, 1998: 39). This conceptualization influenced different Buddhist sects, especially the Zen school (Gentz, 2013: 81), in part because they harmonized with

Japanese animist traditions and their respect for nature (LaFleur, 1989: 195-196).

In regard to *Alchemist*, it does not seem a coincidence that the main and perhaps only truth of this fictional universe is similar to Dao and Zen postulates. First, the relation between alchemy in Asia and Daoism is intensely close (Gentz, 2013). It is from Daoism that two main currents of alchemic metaphysics were born: outer alchemy (*waidan*) and inner alchemy (*neidan*) (ibid: 88). Alchemy in the different forms found in *Alchemist* seems to be deeply influenced by Daoist considerations, with especial emphasis on the philosophical maxim of “the one”.

In *Alchemist* this cosmogonic principle is first introduced by Izumi sensei: “One is all and all is one”. The maxim refers to the flow of humans and individuality into a greater unity which is the world, the cosmos. This teaching contrasts with the EBT and the trip to the deeper levels of introspection and its fatal consequences. The recurrences of that motto in *Alchemist*, its syntactical relations and intersections with the EBT stand out as the main ontological proposal of the manga and the relation between the subject and the world around. It also confronts, as it was the case in original Daoism, Confucian ethical and moral propositions (Gentz, 2013: 77).

However, Confucianist basic principles do not necessarily confront Dao. Less concerned with ontological questionings Confucianism focuses on social moral rules of conduct and virtue between humans. Mercy and compassion are its main forms, not necessarily contradicting Taoist metaphysics. However, Confucianism has as a central part of its proposal the usage of nature for human purposes with interventions and instrumental actions over it. “Why not domesticate her and regulate her […] Why not control her course and use it?” asked the Confucian philosopher Xunzi (Morris-Suzuki, 1989: 29).

Those two philosophies coexisted and mixed with other proposals from within and outside Japan. It was during the Tokugawa period when neo-Confucianism, influenced by Song dynasty Chinese philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200) permeated and influenced conceptions on the social order in opposition to Daoist levelling impulses (Morris-Suzuki, 1989: 40). This neo-Confucianism taught about the twin concepts of *ki* (the matter of the spirit of which the universe was formed) and *ri* (the organizing principle). The latter was often related to the notion of the Dao, the way and natural orderings. These visions priming Daoism over Confucianism were common in the writings of different thinkers and philosophers of Tokugawa Japan, such as Andō Shōeki (1703-1761).

The opposing attitude to Andō's came from Kumazawa Banzan (1619-1691) and the conservationist attitude. He considered humans as part of a wider whole but with a special role (Morris-Suzuki, 1989: 41). From his postulates one concept was key in Tokugawa: *kaibutsu* or the "opening of things" to be interpreted as "revealing the nature of things", "developing" or "making use of", in this case, nature (Saigusa, 1973: 371-374).

After considering these two oppositional poles in Japanese philosophy *Alchemist* seems to engage fully into that ancestral debate in the frame of the EBT conversation and its questioning of epistemological systems and methods. In a world ruled by alchemy there are two opposing approaches. One is proposed by Izumi sensei, which is the Daoist conception of the world, the universe and its flowing. It is a levelling understanding without hierarchies or intervention into nature. The key is to accept one's role but subverting all kinds of hierarchies and human constructions as artificial.

The other vision comes from the Alchemic episteme of the State of Amestris, sanctioned and materialized in the National Alchemists. They monopolize the conventional approaches to knowledge, science (here represented through alchemy) and its uses. It is through these methods that the brothers manage to commit their EBT. In fact, it is Ed's decision to destroy the synecdoche of that epistemological option (The Gate of Truth)

that allows him to save Al and end their purification journey. The parallel between the destruction of the State that sanctioned alchemy and Ed's renouncement of it marks the last scene of the EBT.

In itself *Alchemist* stands as a proposal for a different and subversive epistemology. Not only does it promote a return to the more ancient Daoist cosmologies and ontologies, it also uses a relatively new medium to present and transmit these proposals as well as fantasy, none of them accidental choices. To begin with the latter, imagination, fantasy and the construction of fictional worlds had been already used in times of abrupt changes in Japan (Napier, 1996). For instance, Izumi Kyōka used it to explore ontological concerns in a moment of uncertainty. He opted to use imagination against the eternal totalizing light of civilization, material progress and scientific knowledge (Figal, 1999: 3). *Alchemist* approaches the established epistemai and myths set up by modernity in Japan (Gluck, 1985; Miyoshi and Harootunian, 1989), challenging them and hinting at some alternatives. It reaffirms ontologies and groups dominated or left aside by the rapid construction of a Modern Empire (Gluck, 1985) such as the minorities, women, dominated classes, the indigenous (Morris-Suzuki, 1989; 18) or even the younger generations (Figal, 1993). These interrogations come into one big challenge to the construction, the form and the pillars that

maintain the structure of the Japanese modern society and the civilization project of *bunmei* (Morris-Suzuki, 1989). It thus stands as declaration in favour of those subsumed by the unquestioned fast pace of the state machinery.

Knowledge, since Meiji Japan was understood to be under the interests of the State and its main goal to modernize the country and break with the immediate past (Morris-Suzuki, 1988). To do that the government abandoned the Chinese notion of *ka* (order and outward propriety) for the more Western term of *bunmei* (ibid: 24). However, *bunmei* is laden with connotations of progress, hierarchy and material production (Fukuzawa, 1973: 13-14) abandoning the primordial aim for the harmony of *ka*. Around this obsession with *bunmei* the State centralized its aims to reconstruct and redefine essential ontological questions such as the relations between humans and nature (Morris-Suzuki, 1988: 25). This tension is further developed in the following section.

Civilization, Power and State

The kingdom of Amestris, the state where *Alchemist* takes place represents the elements of the organization Max Weber feared (Berman, 1982: 27). Power has been seized by a corrupted military force with plans to expand to serve a hidden object: controlling everything. Every movement and the lives of the State's subjects are investigated and controlled in every moment.

All opposition is violently annihilated, while it supports and fosters the manipulation of nature in order to achieve their own ambitions. Therefore, Amestris, although being a fictional state disguised under European appearance bears several similarities with the Japan of the 1930s and 1940s. Arakawa herself argued that the relation between Amestris and the minorities living inside of it was a critique of the Japanese government and their activities against the Ainu (Wong, 2006).

But *Alchemist* criticises other aspects of Japan that are not limited to the early Showā period. One of them is a challenge traditional and nuclear patriarchal families. It aims to subvert the essentialized values that modernity came to fix as immobile truisms (Harootunian, 2000). *Alchemist* sympathizes with those subjects that the hegemonic power or modernization and civilization have left behind. It opposes the first part of Ueyama Shumpei's optimism about modern industrial civilization which was based on "science" and "freedom" as producer of great benefits for humanity (Morris-Suzuki, 1998: 144). Arakawa would, however, emphasize the second part of Ueyama's argument stressing that these benefits came with negative spiritual and social consequences that act like poison to our world (ibid). However, neither Ueyama or Arakawa go as far as to propose antidotes for that poison.

There have been other theorists that have argued about humanity's future too. For instance, Itō Shintarō discusses about a new human epoch-making revolution and a new human revolution (*ningen kakumei*) which would mark the start of a new era (Itō, 1990). That revolution would come after the decline of the mechanistic cosmology, the decline of old industrialized economies and environmental crisis (Morris-Suzuki, 1998: 150). That new transformation or "bio-world revolution" (*sei sekai kakumei*) will involve a synthesis between these traditional binary oppositions. The individual and the group, the material and spiritual, the underdeveloped and the developed and finally the human and natural worlds will combine (Itō, 1990; Morris-Suzuki, 1998: 150). This is never stated so strongly by *Alchemist* but these concepts and values discussed by Itō are hinted at and defended by the open ending the manga offers. It is not the destruction but change, the harmonious combination of the forces in collision which, together, could create a unified balanced cosmos, an indeed Daoist proposal reminiscent of the *ka* discussed before (ibid: 24). The individual, then, is part of that whole entity, a relation not exempt from conflicts and debates.

The Individual and the Group

Concerns about individuality and community have taken different expressions such as subjectivity, isolation, loneliness on one extreme and the formation of larger or more complex structures such as the State or the Nation on the other. This concern is

recurrently present and discussed in *Alchemist* in the form of subjectivity, the individual and the group and related to that, youth and family.

Subjectivity (*shutaisei)* is a recurrent theme in Japanese ontological meditations. It is, sometimes related or even equated to individualistic turnings that lead to isolation and alienation. For instance, Markus Nornes, among others, criticizes the turn to the self of 1990s films and documentaries (Nornes, 2002: 41). Some of these comments derive from equating that movement to nihilism and lack of commitment to relevant problems of the society. Documents of the self in Japan, they argue, come from a vaguely apolitical place (ibid) and thus represent an atomic emptiness, endeavours close to Miyadai's proposals (1988). However, Nornes' criticism is not against introspection *per se*, or the subjective but to the 1990s motivations behind it. This subjective turn contrasts with Matsumoto Takeaki's approach in the 1960s. In Matsumoto's conceptualisation of subjectivity "is inseparable from larger social and political problems" thus any examination of the self was accompanied by questionings of political and social problems such as nationalism, gender or modernity (Nornes, 2002: 66).

The quest for subjectivity was therefore present long before the Lost Decade. Indeed, different modes of subjectivity have been ardently discussed during the whole postwar period related to the

nation, modernist notions of culture and historical continuities (Iida, 2005: 7). Some like Ara Masato have argued that the subject could only represent our own experience and that should be literature's starting point (Koschmann, 1996: 58). It is from there that we can connect with others conciliating individualism with wider possibilities, although through a positive consideration of egoism (Iida, 2005: 76).

On the other hand, Marxist theory has been commonly opposed to the use of subjectivity as it was believed that the subject was locked into materially and historically determined conditions beyond the individual's power (ibid: 99). For instance, Yoshimoto Takaaki argues that reconciliation of both subjective and structural material determinations is theoretically a misinterpretation and detrimental to resistance (Yoshida, 1991: 17). However, Yoshimoto reconciles the inner examination of our life and proposes to think about our experiences and the "internal investigation of ourselves" with a Marxist class-consciousness at the centre (Yoshimoto, 1964: 10-11).

This self-introspection would be later discussed by movements such as the *Beheiren*, the *Zenkyōtō* or much later thinkers like Miyadai. *Beheiren* members aimed to affirm themselves by liberating their senses while the *Zenkyōtō* proposed self-denial to affirm their identity (Iida, 2005: 126). The last of all of them, Miyadai is situated in a different context, far from the radicalism

and political activeness of popular movements of the 1960s. Discussing subjectivity in the 1990s (Miyadai, 1988; Iida, 2000: 435) was influenced by an intense fragmentation of the subject, increased by reactionary appropriations of meaning and the commercialization of the individual (Iida, 2005: 226). Other explorations on the subject come from Murakami Haruki's literature although, as Asada Akira comments, they are not reflective of the social turmoil of the context (2000: 36).

That theme of the individual and the community is in *Alchemist* always deeply connected to the EBT. By looking at the scenes most directly referring to the Elrics' transgression we can see a metaphor of subjective introspection; a deep immersion in the self and the individual psyche. That journey is represented as a negative action leading to pollution manifested through body mutilation and trauma. Indeed, this form of epistemological journey is diametrically opposed to the main principle that Izumi sensei, and the manga as an extension, proposes: "one is all, and all is one". As discussed, this Daoist principle connects the subject to the cosmos diffusing the relevance of the individual over the importance of something greater.

This inner journey is a representation of the brothers' extreme withdrawal and its consequences. The mourning and craving of the Elrics disconnects them from the community. They therefore fail to separate themselves from their mother (the dead) and

consequently fail in their reincorporation into the group (van Gennep, 1969). This obsession with the dead is depicted as profoundly negative, even dangerous to themselves and the world. The EBT thus not only presents extreme harm to the transgressors but also to the world. This maximizes the negative depiction of this behaviour sanctioning it not only as an individual unacceptance of death but also as a selfish attack on the group.

The protagonists in *Alchemist* manage to purify themselves due to two main steps and decisions, both regarding their relation to the community they wish to re-join, it reinforces their humanity. The first is their resolution to refuse to make the philosopher's stone if that requires using human lives. Not only do they never doubt their decision but also battle those behind such acts. The second is Ed's decision to give up his alchemic powers by vanishing the Gate of Truth to rescue his brother. This resolution is supported by Ed's comprehension of the relevance of the community and his reincorporation to the group. Indeed, this resolution of the brothers' EBT and the way they attained purification presents a particular ethos from *Alchemist*, an ethical proposal which deals with profound issues of late modern Japan as I will argue in the conclusion of this chapter. For now, I aim to discuss the distinct uses of the medium of manga in *Alchemist* and how the EBT is depicted by these features.

Content and Medium

Having overviewed the conversations in which *Alchemist* engages I now turn to: how does it do so through the medium of manga? To discuss the EBT and the different intersecting themes Arakawa uses the tools of the medium, especially its two main different modes: the verbal and pictorial. Here I focus on medium-content relations; even more precisely what this combination tells us about *Alchemist* meditations on manga as a communicative tool. But even more concretely I focus now on the relation between the manga genre in which *Alchemist* is ascribed, the values it presents and the debates in which it is engaged.

According to Peter Coogan (2012) there are two main views of the concept of genre in the literature of comic studies. One argues that genre acts as a system for normalizing ideologies; the second understands genre as a dramatization of shared values that structure a society and which are animated resolving, in the end, these cultural tensions. These affirmations work in several examples of the hero and superhero genre as Coogan argues. However, *Alchemist*, which belongs to *shōnen manga* seems to conflict, contrast and challenge these understandings.

Indeed, it can be argued that *Alchemist* ends by resolving, although not completely, the conflicts it establishes, the binary oppositions and the debates it sets up through its narrative. Nevertheless, as has been discussed in the previous section,

Arakawa's manga stands not so much as an ideology normalizer or a cultural tension resolver. It has a bit of both, but also many other features. Let's clarify this. Throughout the whole narrative *Alchemist* constructs and fosters challenges to different values, premises and concepts that Japanese modernity has aimed to leave undiscussed (Gluck, 1985; Miyoshi and Harootunian, 1989). Therefore, *Alchemist* does not present a resolution of these crises being more interested in the crisis (understood as a change) itself and how the characters cope with it. In *Alchemist,* the central tension takes place in the revolving nature of a collapsing system and the rising of another quite resonant with 21st century Japan. And, although far from a Marxist perspective in the manga, *Alchemist* could easily agree with Gramsci's affirmation that "[t]he crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (1971: 276). It is in that clash between systems that the brothers' journey is situated. Its end coincides with the death of a world after a moment of climatic crisis in which the old order is finally defeated providing the conditions for a rethinking of its pillars.

However, there is a similarity between Coogan's observations and the ending *Alchemist* offers. As has already been discussed, part of the brothers' purification is related, or aided by, their rite of reintegration (Van Gennep, 1969) in the community. In the last

scene discussed, Ed and Al, together, join their new and old friends. Moreover, Ed claims that part of his decision to destroy the Gate is based on his recent awareness of the help and presence of his friends, of the community to which he belongs. Both brothers now not only claim to understand Izumi's motto "one is all, all is one", but they also put that knowledge into practice. Their reintegration is, therefore, part of their purification process, a final sanctioning and confirmation of the end of their journey. Therefore, their EBT is caused by their self-alienation from their friends leading them to commit the final offense and to be punished as a consequence. Their whole journey is an ontological quest that ends once they understand their connection with the rest of the world, their role and link with the cosmos. It is a process that requires them to first acknowledge the necessity for their reintegration and then pursue that course. The relevancies are therefore placed not so much in the rite of separation from their mother but in the insertion back into the community.

However, *Alchemist* presents an interesting feature in that rite of passage to join the community again. Here, in contrast to attaining purification and then being able to be reinserted, it seems that both situations are almost simultaneous, or at least their relationship is far more complex. It is after Ed acknowledges the relevance of belonging to something greater than himself or

his immediate family that he is ready to be purified, and only then is this granted.

Therefore, almost all the relevant tensions *Alchemist* presents revolving around the EBT are resolved by a rite which aims for both order and integration (van Gennep: 1969; Douglas, 1966), making their relation imperative. Thus, the EBT, as an origin of the different themes in *Alchemist,* constructs a frame in which different oppositional values conflict creating a debate that develops as it is explored through its narrative and its visual representation in the manga. These concepts and logics build up the tension and challenge each other in an increasing climax that is finally resolved by the brothers' meeting in the last scene. Harmony is thus restored as some values manage to triumph and establish a new system in which the new order is represented as fairer and more natural. Nevertheless, we may still question, what does this fantasy world of *Alchemist* propose; or in other words, what is it telling us about our world, our human condition?

Conclusion

The work of Arakawa Hiromu *Fullmetal Alchemist* explores through the possibilities of manga and the centrality of the EBT different preoccupations which intensified in early 21st century Japan. However, *Alchemist* not only points at different problems in Japanese society, but it also constructs a powerful narrative that transmits the emotions that trouble that fictional world, and

ours. This narrative, through the EBT's abstract capacities, discusses both ontological recurrences and contextual manifestations. Thus, while the themes of life and death and the nature of being are central to the story, so are those intersecting themes regarding the state of contemporary familiar structures, gender and political struggles. The EBT is therefore a vehicle that allows the discussion of both sets of concerns in a coherent abstract and narrativized form.

Arakawa constructs an imaginary landscape that shares the same problems she perceives in her world but framed into the metaphors the fantastic allows. Therefore, these outcomes and solutions, impossible in our world are not acting only as explorations of the uncanny but also as allegories of the same values, concepts and premises that work once translated to our own realities. And, therefore, the solutions *Alchemist* proposes are applicable and directly translatable to the non-fictional world.

Now, to succeed in the transmission of *Alchemist*'s particular ontologies, solutions and *epistemai* the use of the possibilities and observances of the manga's language are explored to create a powerful emotional engagement on these themes. Therefore, for the manga to succeed it has to construct a captivating, emotionally intense and direct visual narrative. Thus, Arakawa meditates about the language of the manga and its capacities adjusting them in relation to the conversations in which it

engages, and the principles it aims to vindicate. Hence, *Alchemist* presents not only a meditation on the themes already discussed but also on the pertinence of using these new communicative vehicles. The manipulation of time, the combination of words and images to guide readers' attention and the perspectives used to organize the scenes are some of the tools used by Arakawa. The theme is thus not only actualized reaching a wider or different audience from previous times and media (Napier, 2005), it also places manga at the centre of the supportive forms that meditate and discuss themes of great complexity. Furthermore, *Alchemist* challenges not only modern and traditional values and ontologies but it also elevates new media to the role of pertinent spaces for elaborate conversations. Arakawa shows how capable contemporary Japanese popular culture is in dealing with meditations on essential principles, as well as on crucial current debates on the late modern Japanese context.

But *Alchemist* goes beyond the mere pointing out and stating of the problems. It leaves a clear end with an EBT that is finally resolved. Arakawa hints at a way to sort out the problems that concern her the most. Among these issues *Alchemist* stresses isolation and the relation with the world around us including other humans and nature. There is a proposition from the manga and its ending, especially from the last scene here discussed. The

main tension *Alchemist* draws is not between the living and the dead but between isolation and reintegration.

As Anne Allison argues (2006) children and youths are the most affected by this feeling of atomistic isolation far from human relationships and familiar love (340-1). Arakawa speaks directly to what she knows would be her audience: young boys and girls close to adolescence. Consequently, *Alchemist* encourages youngsters to go back to the group, but a group that is not limited to the traditional idea of the community or the family. Now, in *Alchemist* the group is constituted and chosen by the protagonists based on relations of sympathy and affection. Therefore, Arakawa's message to her readers is clear: make your own relations, discover, journey and struggle if you must to find those who love you and whom you love, and once you have done that, treasure their affection. After all it is only through our inclusion with the greater "all" that we can fully fulfil ourselves, "the one". It is an optimistic and positive message for it aims to construct something new that would alleviate the apprehension and anxiety of a time of insecurity and loneliness.

It is in that same context and with the EBT as a thematic nucleus to explore ontologies of postmodern Japan in which the anime *Journey to Agartha* engages. An anime released one year after the last volume of *Alchemist* series was published. The same questions are discussed but now with the understanding that the

EBT is not only a thematic intersection. Now, the following chapter explores how the anime medium, with its own features and modes approaches the EBT and what the result of that theme-medium interaction is.

Chapter III. Journey to Agartha: Transgression and Punishment

In the previous chapter I argued that the manga *Fullmetal Alchemist* explores the EBT aiming to discuss and delve into this conversation from various angles, possibilities, limitations and consequences. Many characters in the manga engage with the EBT conversation as their lives intersect with the Elric brothers, the protagonists actingt as paradigmatic transgressors. From this exploration *Alchemist* reaches the conclusion that the least harmful way to approach death, mourning and loss is to let go and re-join the community.

Alchemist argues that the temptation to separate oneself from the living – either by remaining in the past or joining those leaving us - is too great to be dealt with alone. But *Alchemist* does not blame the transgressor; quite the opposite, as it tells the story from his perspective. Thus, *Alchemist* works to understand this rebellious act while posing a question about the role and responsibilities of the community. In the end it concludes by constructing a new group and communitarian feeling as the result of the deep and intense questionings and interrogations that destroyed the preceding world. It is only then, after the demise of a cosmos that led the Elrics to the EBT that a new and more

welcoming community arises. Still, even then, the relationship between individuals and the community, the living, and the dead remains subject to construction, negotiation, success and failure. It is a human-made phenomenon bound to tensions and fluctuations by new fragmented authorities and powers. Finally, as a projection of that realization, it is only through human negotiation that the boundaries between life and death, the human and the natural and their intersections can be defined, established and maintained. The EBT is, therefore, continuous as a conversation that serves as an abstraction of more contextually situated worries, concerns and hopes.

Journey to Agartha (*Journey*) was released in 2011, at the end of the Second Lost Decade. The film has the EBT as central structuring theme. As Shinkai Makoto, the director of the film has repeatedly expressed in interviews, his idea was to use the EBT as a narrative structure in *Journey* (Manry, 2011). It was a theme, he argues, familiar to the public, with a fixed structure that will serve to explore Agartha, the world he was interested in creating. Shinkai thus engaged in the EBT conversation with a clear aim, to show from beginning to end how negative, perilous and defiling such rebellion against the laws of the cosmos is. This straightforwardness is uncommon to Shinkai's previous works, in which ambiguity and lack of clarity complicate the story and its understanding (Duke, 2014; Grādjan, 2015). This is not the case

for *Journey,* a film that delegitimises the EBT from the start. To do that, Shinkai uses a male adult character, Morisaki, as the physical representation of the transgressor, a character the film portrays as uncanny, fanatical and selfish. Morisaki, and by extension the EBT are constantly delegitimised, confronted and opposed until the end when the film shows how polluting and destructive both are. The whole aim of the film regarding the EBT is thus to stress, emphasise and communicate its wrong and disastrous motivations and consequences.

This chapter looks into how the project of *Journey* aims to reinforce the boundary between life and death and the concept of nature's power as superior to humanity's. It also explains that the EBT in *Journey* is framed by the dialectical encounters between two main allegorical categories in the film. On the one hand the "flow of nature" represents the order of the universe sanctioned by the authorities of Agartha and the film itself: Agartha's deontological ethics. On the other hand, the EBT stands as a rebellion against the rules of both nature and Agartha.

The film then represents and explores the confrontations and intersections of both projects and categories through the eyes of Asuna, the child protagonist whose fluctuations for and against the EBT structure the narrative and the experience of the film. This, I argue, relates to contemporary debates and interrogations on Japan's intergenerational tensions, coming of age and rites of

passage in relation to maturity, responsibility, freedom and the power to exercise and maintain them. These are the themes and categories that structure the analysis of the EBT in *Journey* and which, at the same time, help us to better understand its construction in the anime. Thus, these features are studied through the framing device of the animated medium and its language. In other words, I explore the construction and representation of these categories and their dialogues through the modes anime provides to take part on the EBT conversation.

The chapter concludes by discussing the engagement of *Alchemist* and *Journey* and how their dialogue relates to the EBT. I argue these cultural manifestations tell us about the EBT and its representation through contemporary media as well as what they involve and say about early 21st century Japan. As cultural products that are both influenced by and influence the intertextuality of their culture they are voices that express different approaches to the EBT theme, its debates and intersecting interrogations.

Journey to Agartha, Animating Transgression

Before analysing *Journey* there are some comments on the methods and theoretical approaches to anime that I would like to address. First, although part of the methodologies here come from film studies, anime is a differentiated medium from live-action films that requires specific approaches. For instance,

anime (animation in general) is, from its making to its own ontology and phenomenology, divergent from live action films as it is not the filming of moving images but the production of images that are filmed (Wells, 2012: 230). To that, animator Norman McLaren added that “[a]nimation is not the art of drawings that move, but rather the art of movements that are drawn” thereby “what happens between each frame is more important that what happens in each frame” (Solomon, 1987: 11). Animation is then the art of constructing and depicting transformation.

Within academia, animation has been a relatively under-studied subject field (Darley, 2007: 63). This is especially so if we consider enquiries regarding animation’s ontology, what it is, how to define it and how it works. More literature can be found about case studies than about how we understand the term animation itself. Then, although this PhD’s main aim is to study how the EBT theme is represented through animation, this is done by delving into the studio’s meditation on the medium they use to communicate. It is then key to review the previous literature on the definition on animation and its experiencing.

Animation constitutes a distinctive and particular form of cinema that operates as a language of expression (Wells, 2012: 230). Animation is now presented in a wide range of forms such as television, websites, mobile phones, electronic displays, computer games or even live action films. Initially, the study of

animation stressed its differences from live action filmmaking process to reverse its neglected status. Animation was thus, generally, dismissed as less relevant, being pushed to the margins of art, cinema story or popular culture. But what is then animation?

The question, in the post-photographic era of filmmaking has prompted new debates. Although both film-making processes have been affected by digital technologies, blurring the boundaries between them, animation is still recognised as different (Wells, 2012: 231). Part of its singularity comes from its ability to represent and manifest the impossible. In the pre-digital era, animation was the process in which materials such as puppets, drawings, clay and so on were filmed 'frame-by-frame' altering the elements of the scene to create an illusion of movement. The frame was then the key to the increment of the illusion of movement, dynamism or change. This changed, however, in the digital era, although animation still uses mostly artificially created movement instead of transferring it from the world. Movement is essential to animation, argued Norman McLaren, and that is what the medium represents and tries to express (Solomon, 1987: 11). For McLaren, animation's true essence is the manipulation of movements between frames, that is, what it is not seen but imagined. Therefore, according to Wells, animators concern is not on the frame itself, but on the space in

“which the motion of artificial figures, objects and forms is sequentially constructed over time” (2012: 231). Thus, the key of animation lies on the artificially constructed modes of movement, how these are created, represented and communicated to the viewer.

But as important as what constitutes the core of animation it is how this is represented. Animation works based on stylisation and abstraction. To animate, according to the Zagreb School, is to “give life and soul to a design, not through the copying but through the transformation of reality’ (Holloway, 1972: 9). Animation thus exaggerates reality, but it goes beyond that, representing what cannot be seen, what does not exist, and what can only be imagined (Horno, 2017). To the Zagreb school that “giving life” (etymologically to animate) is to reveal something about that object otherwise unseen. Thus, the main characteristics of the medium are: symbolisation (both of objects and living beings), picturing the invisible, penetration, selection, exaggeration and transformation, showing the past and predicting the future and controlling speed and time (Wells, 2006).

Symbolism can work to simplify and clarify an idea, using icons, symbols or signs. Picturing the invisible relates to the representation of natural phenomena such as waves or the wind but also non-physical or metaphorical sensations. The penetration of the interior refers to more or less complex inner

states and workings such as the interior of the body or a machine but also dreams, memories and so on. It thus manipulates conceptual or literal interpretations, clarifying some messages or obscuring them. On this regard, animation can exaggerate, selecting different elements from a scene and accentuating them. It can, consequently, transform and manipulate any element to variate its relevance or its role. Finally, as it controls time it can travel and connect different periods, merge the past and the future or show their relation. It can also manipulate the duration of events, varying the amount of information that is given to the audience and how much time they have to observe it.

On this regard, Halas reinforces the control of the animator in the construction of artificial, fictional or fantastic worlds (Halas, 2006). It is up to the animator to determine the degree of realism or abstraction of his story, space and time (Wells, 2012:232). The animator, however, moves and manoeuvres within the blurring boundaries of the sociocultural contract, depending on what he predicts would be understood from his work, and how s/he anticipates it would be experienced. It is that impression and representation of the irreal, imaginable and intangible what, for some, lies at the core of animation (Smoodin, 1994: 139). This gives animation subversive abilities that can represent chaos and disruption. However, at the same time, that capacity of imagining chaos would make it approachable, reachable to human

phenomenology (Langer, 1948: 233). Therefore, animation can bring to life collective and individual fantasies, dreams, hopes and fears (Barrier, 1999: 142). Animation can also defy the laws of physics, contesting perceptions of time and space, of what is possible, alive or dead. It, consequently, alters and changes the world in its own cosmogenesis challenging conceptualisations of reality and its representation (Wells, 2012: 232),

Now, animation in Japan, although intensely influenced by Western styles, specially Disney, shows its own distinctive aesthetics, subgenres and characteristics (Dixon and Graham, 2017: 47). Animation in Japan comes from its link to previous artistic traditions, narratively, thematically and visually (Horno, 2017: 46). The first animated films in Japan dealt with old folktales, fables and myths while incorporating aesthetic features from a variety of visual arts such as medieval scrolls, Buddhist materials, *ukiyo-e*, or even theatre (ibid). In Japan, the first animated films date back to early 20th century. However, it was not until the mid-1960s that anime as a specific genre with its own characteristics would be popularised by director Tezuka Osamu. Some of anime's aesthetics come from limited animation, its complex narrative and a singular drawing style (ibid).

On regard to limited animation, this term refers to scarce movement on the animation of characters. To add a sense of dynamism this technique uses filmic resources such as moving

the camera over the drawings. These techniques aimed to increase the movement of the scene in studios with constraints of time and money. Colour is, as well, a defining feature in anime as most of anime's characters are completed with flat inks and a wide scale of shades adding more volume to the images.

Nevertheless, anime's differentiation from Western animation has been steadily blurred as its influence increases globally. This trend has been reinforced by the collaboration between Japanese animators or studios in Western-based productions. This is the case of Shinkai, whose film 'Journey to Agartha' aimed to reach and be more approachable to a non-Japanese audience. *Journey*, however, would use anime aesthetics continuously referencing Studio Ghibli's visuality and themes that, despite being global or universal, spoke to the Japanese public about the country's myths, traditions and social and cultural concerns.

These are the key elements that guide the analysis of *Journey*'s EBT. Although the study of the *mise en scène*, the angles, frames or shots are essential to understanding animation so are those techniques that address what makes this medium different. Therefore, my focus is not only on the formal characteristics of the scene, but also on how the medium works to manipulate reality. Mainly, the centre of the analysis focuses on the symbolic representationation of both human beings and objects, the transformation and selection of the scene elements and the

alterations of time, space, movement, colour, lighting or background. The aim is to focus on the representation of the dialogues and encounters between the flow of nature and the EBT and how they impact the viewer's experience of the film through Asuna.

Approaches to Animation

The study of animation I propose here is similar to the methods used for manga, in regard to its focus and aim. The approach to manga of this PhD was led by its aim to comprehend how the medium frames the EBT to understand what is it that it is telling about the theme. Therefore, I have focused on the narrative construction and manipulation of time and the organisation and framing of its elements. A focus on framing and the *mise en scène* had been key and I thus reproduce and adapt these approaches to the animated medium.

The differences between manga and anime can be drawn from the theoretical introduction of Chapter II and the present chapter. Thus, while the action is developed in manga through a spatial sequence in panels and pages, the space the frame occupies in animation is always the same. One frame follows another occupying the same place at a speed that produces a sense of movement (Wells, 2012). This is key for the understanding of what animation does and what animation is. This new feature is what gives animation its ability to represent movement, but also

transformation, change, metamorphosis and to make visible the invisible (Lamarre, 2009). The camera thus travels and produces the feeling of the passing or freezing of time, an essential feature of the animated medium, an action that depends on the organisation of the elements within the scene (Horno, 2013).

The *mise en scène* and framing in animation are, therefore, as important as in manga. With the movements of the camera animation directs the viewing experience pointing and leading to specific elements or actions. I thus propose an initial approach similar to the study of manga. I conduct, therefore, three main viewings of the film: the first to familiarise myself with the anime and attempt a watching experience similar to any implicit viewer. With the second viewing I identify the scenes in which the EBT is discussed. The third viewing is made up of the subsequent examinations of the selected scenes Finally, the analysis here presented focuses only on those scenes in which the transgression is advanced or new information about the EBT in *Journey*'s world is communicated to the viewer. A similar exercise of translation and breakdown to linguistic terms will be used to find out the essential elements of each shot and scene for the advancing of the plot. Therefore, different viewings of *Journey* will be necessary to situate the EBT within the film, the characters and their relation to the main dramatic tension. Thus, the main focus of my approach to *Journey* deals with what is

included in each frame, how does the camera, lighting and colour work as well as their duration and relation to other shots, that is, the sequence of the scene.

The selected scenes are then cut into shots to be deeply studied based on the mentioned features: narrative sequence (how each relate to the overall scene and the film's telling of the EBT) and the organisation of the shots (camera movements, perspectives, type of shots, elements included, actions developed). In conclusion this approach is made up of three stages: the three different viewings, the translation of the shots and scenes and the study and thick description of how the mise en scène and the narrative sequence engage the EBT conversation.

The story of Journey to Agartha

The story of Journey to Agartha presents a complex construction of different but parallel worlds. It also recurrently uses alterations of time to explain the characters' motivations, to aid their justification and to allow a better understanding of their choices and positions regarding the EBT.

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Asuna is a school girl whose mother is almost always absent due to her work at a hospital and whose father passed away when she was a toddler. Asuna spends her free time trying to reach

distant radio signals using a strange apparatus operated through a mysterious stone, a memento of her father. One day she meets a mysterious boy who rescues her from a monster, a “Quetzalcoatl”. After finding out her new friend has died she meets with Morisaki sensei, a substitute teacher who tells her about the possibility of resurrecting the dead. Later that day she meets Shin, brother of her deceased friend and, running from Morisaki and a group of soldiers they reach Agartha.

There, Asuna decides to follow Morisaki whose intention is to reach the netherworld and resurrect his deceased wife. Through their journey they meet up with different Agarthians who try to stop or dissuade them from that endeavour. Eventually Asuna parts away from Morisaki who manages to reach the land of the dead. He there manages to resurrect his wife but is then asked to give her spirit a corporeal sacrifice. Asuna then appears with Shin to stop her teacher. Morisaki trades Asuna’s body to revive Lisa but Shin breaks the stone that connects both worlds and stopping the transference. Asuna is rescued, Morisaki loses one of his eyes as consequence and loses his wife once again.

The movie ends with Shin and Morisaki staying to live in Agartha while Asuna returns to her world, managing to graduate from school and entering adolescence.

The EBT, Rebellion Against the Order of the Universe

The EBT is the structuring theme of *Journey*'s story and its main dramatic tension. However, it takes more than half an hour in the film to introduce it. During that time the viewer is familiarised with Asuna, the protagonist, her situation and personal circumstances. But from the moment the EBT appears it hints at the constant struggles in favour or against it that Asuna will develop. Around these fluctuations *Journey* develops its dramatic tension; a tension marked by the intense insecurities the EBT projects on Asuna. Eventually the story resolves its protagonist's journey and internal struggles when Asuna finally decides to first, abandon the EBT and, finally, to embrace the ontological project of the "flow of nature" that both Agartha and the film propose as righteous. These fluctuations show how Asuna abandons her neutrality regarding this confrontation between the EBT and the flow of nature for an initial support of the rebellion and finally a definitive confrontation against it. The film's action thus starts once Asuna, for the first time, faces the pain of mourning to a point that tempts her to accompany Morisaki to Agartha.

This section deals with the representation of the tensions around the flow of nature and the rebellion against it through the anime language. To do that, I focus on the clashes that lead Asuna to witness the debate without much active participation in it. The section follows the EBT in *Journey* from its appearance to its final

failure in the end of the film. There are four subsections that help organize the study of the EBT's progression, construction and depiction: the various conversations before the rite; the preparation of the resurrection; its temporal success and, lastly, its definitive failure.

EBT Polyphony, Tensions and Confrontations

Two Distinct Transgressions: Asuna's and Morisaki's

The EBT appears in *Journey* once Asuna is confronted with the death of her friend Shun. The EBT is then introduced through three linked scenes that work to present and build up Asuna's motivations to journey to Agartha: first, Asuna's father's funeral; second, Morisaki's lecture and Asuna's *kathabasis* and third, Asuna's following investigation on the EBT at the school library and conversation with Morisaki.

The first scene shows how Asuna, after being told about Shun's death, decides to run to the crag in the forest where they stayed the first time. There, after shouting Shun's name the film shows, through a flashback, the funeral of Asuna's father. This scene is key to understanding the two main options or stances regarding death and loss in *Journey*. As Asuna's mother tries to gather enough courage to live on she recalls that her husband always said that "death was part of life" but she cannot stand his passing away and falls to her knees crying (00.27.39).

This scene is relevant for two reasons. First it shows Asuna's lack of paternal figure, a void that motivates her isolation and *kathabasis* by following Morisaki in a quest that is not her own. But the scene also introduces the flowing of nature against a more painful and dramatic incapability to deal with loss, to let go and accept the workings of the universe. The EBT lures over as a temptation from the moment it appears. For Asuna, who encounters it accidentally, it is not just a dream but a possibility, increasing its attraction encouraged by Morisaki's story and Asuna's vision of Shun leading the way to Agartha, both simultaneous events.

These events coincide with the first time Asuna hears about the myth of Izanagi in the *Kojiki* and the first time she encounters the narrativized version of what she is experimenting with the temptation to the EBT. The scene is punctuated by the reactions of the students and the incompleteness of the narration by Morisaki. In regard to the first one, *Journey* emphasizes the unsettling of both the myth and Morisaki's telling. In the shot showing the students almost all of them are shown deeply uneasy and uncomfortable with the theme. Asuna, however, is the most moved of the pupils. Listening to the myth transports her into a pool to the entrails of the Earth (Figure 3.1). There, her friend Shun opens a gate on the wall using the magical stone *clavis* (Figure 3.2). Before she reaches Shun she is awakened

by Morisaki ending the story and closing the book. The teacher then mentions the universality of the relation between the EBT and the world of the dead producing a commotion in Asuna by mentioning Agartha, a disturbance Morisaki notices.

Figure 3. 1. *Asuna descends to find Shun opening the Gate to Agartha*

Figure 3. 2. Shun opens the gate to the netherworld with the clavis

The scene continues after the lecture. Then, a friend of Asuna's utters her fear of Morisaki, a grim figure who, she adds, lost his wife years ago. This discovery thus links the myth of Izanagi and

the sombre attitude of the teacher while narrating it. This, however, does not stop Asuna from delving into the story as she investigates the myth further in the library (Figure 3.3). Simultaneously, Morisaki asks Asuna's tutor about her, discovering that her father passed away when she was a toddler, leading Asuna to a self-imposed isolation. Thus, both stories and lives are now connected and their fates will be intertwined in the following scenes.

Figure 3. 3. Asuna researches the Kojiki and discovers its ending

However, before Asuna faces the choice regarding the EBT she first makes use of the limited possibilities at her reach. It is through the knowledge she acquires at the school library that she discovers the ending of Izanagi's myth. This event has two main outcomes for her. First, she must come to terms with the idea that the EBT is bound to fail and that it also exposes the whole of creation to destruction. The cosmos works with a simple logic in which what dies never returns. Subverting that reality

jeopardises the world and the universe by reversing and harming its logic and laws.

The second consequence of this discovery is Asuna's realisation that Morisaki has purposely hidden the most essential information of the lecture. A teacher is supposed to inform students and even to protect them, if necessary. Morisaki was supposed to educate his students about how to live, how to prepare for turning into adults. However, Morisaki tells them an incomplete story, and through that omission he exposes them to either a selfish disregard about the consequences of the EBT or a delusional approach incapable of dealing with the doomed outcome of the EBT. Morisaki is thus, from the beginning, portrayed as a deeply untrustworthy character, a failure as an adult and a danger as a teacher. As he has not matured, he has not become a man and he is incapable of guiding others to adulthood.

Going back to Asuna, she keeps investigating the EBT and thus she visits Morisaki at his house. There new information about him is exposed. For instance, he seems to be writing a report about mythology regarding Agartha and the EBT; but he stops to listen to a little music box. His eyes twinkle with the sound implying an intense emotional connection to it, a memento of his wife, whom he remembers almost obsessively. But the most striking feature is the gun Morisaki keeps in a locked drawer. Such a discovery

comes as a surprise since it seems disconnected from the picture of a solitary widower teacher. This also emphasizes the image of Morisaki as both mysterious and dangerous at a moment that innocent and defenceless Asuna comes to meet him alone. But it is the first conversation between Asuna and Morisaki that initiates suspicion of the danger he represents.

The first conversation between Asuna and Morisaki does not, initially, make us suspect the latter. The topic is the netherworld in its different manifestations and the possibility of resurrecting the dead. Morisaki's words are uncompromising as he merely shows Asuna the universality of the myth with images from different cultures. He does not comment on his beliefs or his opinion on either the existence of a netherworld or the morality of the EBT. It is, however, through the framing and the depiction through the animated medium that *Journey* hints and confirms the unsettling attitude of Morisaki. As the conversation changes from the origins of Agartha to the EBT Morisaki shifts from a calm tranquillity to an agitated unsettling attitude.

The manipulation and exaggeration of Morisaki's features emphasises the defilement and inner monstrosity of the teacher when discussing the EBT. The theme is brought up by him as he relates the possibility to be granted any wish in Agartha, allowing for the possibility to resurrect the dead. It is Morisaki who makes the connection between the omnipotence of Agartha and the EBT,

a moment represented in the film by an alteration on his face, a change in the music and a darkening of the environment (Figure 3.4). That observation makes an impact on Asuna who seems scared and uneasy about the feasibility of the EBT. She then asks about the reality of Agartha but as the sun disappears and the radio machine starts Morisaki evades the question and asks her to leave. But the conversation does not end there. Before heading home Asuna tells Morisaki that she really believes in Agartha. Unexpectedly, Morisaki does not show a positive reaction by having convinced Asuna. He gets serious and even worried as he advises her to go straight home without leaving the road.

Figure 3. 4. The sun sets and Morisaki makes a disturbing grimace

This scene introduces Morisaki as a deeply enigmatic, ambiguous and dangerous character. He behaves like the archetype of the unreliable middle-aged male we can see in other

anime like Miyazaki Hayao's *Future Boy Conan* (1978) or *Castle in the Sky* (1989). This archetype, constant in Miyazaki's films and later popular manifestations implies a deep mistrust of the ruling generation, of those in power (Lamarre, 2010). For Miyazaki, children are the future, the yet uncorrupted agents in whom to trust the construction of a different world. Morisaki stands as the opposite: an obsessed individualist adult who fails as a teacher, as a mentor, just like his generation. He plants the seed of curiosity about Agartha and the EBT in Asuna, he has a weapon in his house and, most of all, he is obsessed with resurrecting the dead. He is also an evasive adult who wishes no compromise, who leaves every truth half-told, hiding the most relevant information.

Morisaki's self-isolation is then paralleled by Asuna's, linking both characters' EBT. However, with the progression of the film Asuna and Morisaki will steadily diverge from each other. Unlike Morisaki, Asuna is wishing for a possibility, a chance to re-join the community. She craves a paternal figure to show and teach her how to live, how to go on with a new existential and ontological project. In the end, despite both witnessing and experiencing the same events, their reactions diverge into a final opposition. Thus, as the frontiers between life and death are turned upside down, the generational logic becomes altered too and it is the child (Asuna) who saves the adult (Morisaki).

This double tension between Morisaki-Asuna and Asuna to herself structures the film and its dramatic tension. Morisaki shows a straight, unchanging attitude towards the EBT and his quest to resurrect Lisa. Asuna, on the other hand, fluctuates from a neutral position to a self-convinced support of the EBT, one that will end after witnessing the discussion between Morisaki and the old man of the village (Ojiisan from now). Asuna shows an internal struggle as she looks to fill the void left by her father with Morisaki.

This first verbal encounter between Asuna and Morisaki sheds light on Asuna's EBT, motivations and manifestations. But it is during the first days in Agartha when Asuna finally looks at Morisaki and tells him "you look like you were my father" (00.56.56). She blushes and Morisaki takes some time to answer, finally telling her not to say such things. This short exchange shows two main attitudes and tendencies from Asuna and Morisaki's EBT. On the one hand, Asuna's motivation to journey to Agartha is not so much to resurrect the dead. Asuna recurrently shows doubts and uncertainties regarding her choice. But the lack of a paternal figure leads her to be constantly craving advice, for an authority to lead her in the right path. Morisaki proves repeatedly he is not that paternal figure, not only by word but by deeds. Every time Asuna faces her own death and different dangers throughout her journey it is either Shin who

rescues her (twice) or she herself who finds the courage to make the right decision.

As we will see, Morisaki's selfishness and disregard for Asuna or anyone besides himself leads him to commit the worst crime possible: the killing of an innocent child, the outcome of the pollution that denying death brings up. But before that final crime Morisaki is forced to face a tense confrontation with a representative of Agartha's authority in a scene that marks a plot point as Asuna changes her relationship to both teacher and EBT.

Two authorities confronted

A central plot point in *Journey* is the conversation between Morisaki and *Ojiisan*. There the EBT is confronted for the first time by the the flow of nature, its opposing ideological stance. While the conversation is held by two authoritative figures the balance of power favours the elder figure. *Ojiisan* is from the beginning more authoritative than Morisaki as he is a native of Agartha; and has holds more knowledge about the netherworld and the EBT than Morisaki. Also, his age has given him more experience while he has suffered the loss of a daughter, emphasising his own mourning. The scene thus aims to ensure the negativity of this essential rebellion. In doing that the anime's language works to depict Morisaki, and his project, as a perilous and negative existential approach. It is the aim of this section to explore how the conversation is developed and framed to direct

the viewing experience and ensure the comprehension of *Journey's* moral stance against the EBT.

From its start the scene anticipates and prepares viewers for the confrontation to occur. The scene begins with Morisaki interrupting the relaxed feast insisting *Ojiisan* tell him how to succeed on the EBT. It is then, in the second shot that the main antagonising relations and tensions of both scene and the film are visually presented (Figure 3.5). Thus, while the shot is populated by Agarthian elements Morisaki stands out as an outsider, alien to the scenery. Everyone, including Asuna, wears Agarthian clothes and sit in a respectful manner, Morisaki, on the other hand, breaks the chromatic and spatial symmetry as he also distances himself from Asuna, in opposition of the closeness between *Ojiisan* and his granddaughter whose cushions connect them.

Figure 3. 5. Morisaki disrupts the scene chromatically and asymmetrically

Morisaki's insistence is responded to by *Ojiisan* establishing a pattern that remains throughout the entirety of the scene. This pattern is structured in a repetitive interchange with Morisaki interrogating *Ojiisan* on how to commit the EBT and *Ojiisan* responding with a moral warning Morisaki ignores. This pattern shows a deep disconnection between *Ojiisan'*s moral and ethical lecture and Morisaki's pragmatic and self-interested focus. In this regard there are two key moments where the anime's use of movement, sound and colouring express the defiled and dangerous consequences of the EBT and the risk it represents.

The first moment comes after Ojiisan, pushed by the teacher, tells Morisaki that those trying to act against the flow of nature will not be allowed to do so (1.16.20). He uses the word *yurushi*, which means permission as well as pardon, forgiveness and exemption. The disconnection between the two speakers is emphasised again as Morisaki tries to ignore this simultaneous restriction and warning. Morisaki disregards *Ojiisan*'s advice but here, for the first time, he engages in the debate about the project's morality. There Morisaki asks *Ojiisan* why must he ask for any permission, changing the subject immediately, acknowledging his aim is only to extract useful information.

Morisaki is now infuriated showing clear signs of violence and a shift in his attitude. His words are now accelerated, his voice louder accompanied by a clearly tense musical theme previously

absent. Finally, his agitated movements are marked and emphasized by the lighting they produce. Morisaki's eyes turn into a violent grimace stressed by the reflection on his glasses (Figure 3.6) while his wedding ring, an allegory for his wife and EBT sparkles as he closes his hand into a fist (Figure 3.7). This sign of aggression and fury accompanies Morisaki as he tries to bring the conversation back to the practicalities of the EBT.

Figure 3. 6. Morisaki is accompanied by uncanny lighting effects

Figure 3. 7. Morisaki's violence makes his wedding ring sparkle

This constant pushing back to conversing about the EBT's performance instead of its morality is momentarily abandoned by Morisaki. He then acknowledges the necessity to ease *Ojiisan's* concerns about the consequences of this essential rebellion. "What I want to know" Morisaki continues "is where and how can one reunite with their loved ones. That's all" (1.16.37). Morisaki here behaves as a rebel against the universe, as someone who affirms and recognises the existence of a boundary and as such he assures *Ojiisan* his transgression is limited. The theoretical frame of the rebel helps us to understand Morisaki's attitude as he is not trying to challenge the laws of the universe but to suspend them, to pause them (Camus, 1953: 19). Rebellion is thus not a challenge of authority, but a limited confrontation to restore a previous situation, one in which the way those laws worked was acceptable (Foley, 2008, 55). In the case of Morisaki he does not wish to challenge the flow of nature but to restore it by resurrecting Lisa.

This leads to the second and last moment of the conversation. Morisaki, giving up on defending himself or his project loses his temper and attacks *Ojiisan*, Agartha and its ontology. The film, however, removes Morisaki from the centre of the action shifting to Ojiisan's uneasy expression and a shot of the tapestry that represents Agartha's cosmology (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3. 8. The camera descends emphasising the order of the cosmos

This intentional diversion from the speaker, Morisaki, to the listener and the tapestry of Agartha's cosmovision is relevant also for showing the visual representation of what Morisaki is criticising and challenging. He is definitively removed as the centre, invalidating his opinion and making it unworthy of consideration. The tapestry, on the other hand, and the calm and altruistic *Ojiisan,* stands for the right vital approach, one that embraces the flowing of the cosmos, rejoices at life and accepts its end. Both image and words confront each other while the former maintains its paramount position. There, the movement of the camera framing the tapestry from top to bottom emphasizes the relevance of the organization of the world based on the authority that sanctions the flow of nature and its respect. To conclude, the construction of a syncretic imagery and iconography, drawing elements from different traditions aids in

the priming of the tapestry over Morisaki's agitated speech by bewildering and attracting the viewer's attention.

Let's now summarize the main outcomes and information that this conversation presents for *Journey*'s central tension. First, the most evident is the complete opposition between the attitude and behaviour of the two speakers. On the one hand there is the calm, lecturing and positive attitude of *Ojiisan*; on the other, Morisaki's violent behaviour. Always relaxed even when pushed, *Ojiisan* tries to educate Morisaki, to lead him back from the path of destruction. Consequently, *Ojiisan* extends these beneficial attributes of his behaviour to the premise and moral existential project he defends and represents: the flow of nature.

Morisaki, however, is represented as a steadfastly aggressive character, unwilling to understand what it is being said to him, defensive and obstinate as he justifies himself by attacking others. These are the traces and characteristics of the EBT and those committed to it. Rebellion against nature, the cosmos and its order represent a final and unavoidable state of insanity and disruption. The blending of the realms of the living and the dead is already occurring inside the transgressor's mind as its physical manifestation takes the EBT to the limit through the transgression's performance. In other words, the mixing of this world and the netherworld leads to a simultaneous inner

destruction and a transmutation in the physical world that challenges and endangers the universe as a whole.

This conversation is framed within the ideologies of *Ojiisan* and Morisaki and the worldviews they represent. On the one hand, *Ojiisan* is the distant past, the eternal wisdom of nature and its flow. It belongs and lives in a land of fantasy and wisdom that exists within our world, within Japan while in a different plane. *Ojiisan* is therefore close enough to be called “grandfather” but sufficiently uncanny and alien enough to be exempt of any familiar ties, any actual and concrete relations to Asuna. *Ojiisan* thus works as an archetype, an allegorical synecdoche of a disappearing world, of a past that connects and binds us with our ancestors and the entire cosmos. A sort of Yanagita Kunio *jōmin (*Mori, 1980: 89). To Yanagita, the *jōmin* is a feature of Japanese people, referring to a connection to their ancestors through spiritual structures and customs. The concept thus refers to the possibility to access a timeless Japanese core, spirit and psyche through the *jōmin*’s manifestations on every individual.

Morisaki is the opposite, a self-centred individual from the 1960s who, despite having fought in the Second World War has left all ideologies, any sense of responsibility and communalism. Morisaki has, much as Contemporary Japan, embraced his individualism disregarding everyone else for his own desires. But he is still related and linked to *Ojiisan* who tries to redirect him,

to reconnect him to the community that in *Journey* is composed by human relation to the world, to nature, other beings and intangible forces that bound and tie us. Here, being part of the cosmos is a moral stance, an ethical choice, in fact the only alternative to the EBT, to this fatal rebellion.

Therefore, the conversation between *Ojiisan* and Morisaki marks a turning point for Asuna who must face the dialectical defeat of Morisaki, the figure she has blindly followed up to this point. By witnessing a more authoritarian presence confronting and unveiling Morisaki's quest as perilous, harmful and defiling, Asuna's doubts are reinforced and she grows wary of both her teacher and the EBT. From here on Asuna's doubts about Morisaki will increase leading to her final abandonment of him and his rebellion. And the film has conducted the experience through her perspective. Through Asuna as a vehicle we witness the tensions unravelled by the EBT. Asuna is a child trying to make sense of the world, her place in it and her process of becoming. The journey to Agartha is an ontological and existential experience in the key transition from childhood to adult, the turning point of becoming. In that turning point of her life she holds onto an attractive but defiled existential approach, the EBT. However, Asuna finds the righteous path and re-joins the community thanks to the flow of nature, the order of the cosmos and the power of its laws.

Nevertheless, this scene is relevant too for the introduction and initial development of the two ideological tensions that confront and structure the debates and positions of *Journey*: the flow of nature and the EBT rebellion. In addition, there is a third category represented by the influenceable character of the children Asuna and Shun. Through them the moral and ethical battle is mediated, conducted and resolved. Both categories and ideologies are further explored in the climatic last scene of the film, the completion of the EBT. The act is structured in three main consecutive stages: the pre-resurrection, a preparation of the complete blend of the boundaries between life and death; the resurrection, in which the EBT is finally performed and, lastly, the failure of the EBT, in which the resurrection fails completely and each of the main characters comes out expressing their own learning and interpretations of the whole process.

Resurrecting the Dead: the EBT in Agartha

After Asuna witnesses the dialectical defeat and the unsettling attitude of Morisaki her doubts regarding the sanity of her teacher make it impossible to continue with the EBT. She refuses to descend into *Finisterra* and Morisaki abandons her in a dangerous area full of enemies. Asuna, however, comes to realise that Morisaki is not only wrong on his existential approach but that he also is in dire need of help. Left alone, as he has been for more than ten years, it is impossible to be safe from the EBT.

She, now together with Shin returns to the land of the dead to rescue the person she thought would rescue her.

As Morisaki is incapable of letting go, moving on and returning to the living he is stuck in time. Living in the liminal, between boundaries, freezes him. Then, Asuna, who embraces the flow of nature grows up leaving behind her selfish desires and needs. Asuna is now the adult. As she comprehends the truth of the world and her place in it she is able to move on, to leave the past behind.

But this scene goes beyond depicting Morisaki as a failed adult and depicts him, as the essential rebel, as a defiled and dangerous being. The resurrection rite confirms and stresses the EBT transgressor as a character impossible to sympathise with. If up to this point the viewer might have maintained any sort of attachment or empathy for Morisaki or had related to him and his quest this is the moment the film makes sure that link is broken. *Journey* thus has the difficult task to deal with a universal desire or temptation, to bring those loved ones back from the dead, and then has to separate its audience from the transgressor who is committed to that wish. Only by distancing the viewer from Morisaki can *Journey* confirm its success in dissipating any inclination or sympathy with the EBT.

The Pre-resurrection

Before Morisaki manages to state his wish in front of Sakuma Vimana, the god of Agartha, he must first cross the gate to the Land of the Dead and then wait for the god to arrive. During that lapse in time the children manage to reach the Land of the Dead with the help of a dying Quetzalcoatl, the guardian of Agartha. However, by then the resurrection rite has begun. Completion is granted once Asuna shows up as her body is used to host Lisa's soul. The EBT is thus achieved.

There are two main opposing and simultaneous events in this first stage to consider for the representation of the EBT and the flow of nature. One is experienced by Asuna, now defender of Agartha's rules, and Morisaki, unbreakable on his quest. The first one is the encounter between Asuna and a dying Quetzalcoatl, a scene in which, for the first time, the flow of nature is fully displayed and experienced by Asuna and the viewer.

The explanation of the flow of nature comes late in the film, at the final scene, a choice motivated by two reasons. First, explaining the flow of nature inmediately before the EBT emphasises their opposition. The narration has got to a point where Asuna is going to confront her teacher. The EBT is finally going to be completed and all the tensions will be resolved. Then, the flowing of nature serves as counterpart and contrast to the dark, unsettling violence that is about to be unchained. Related to that, this scene

allows the flowing of nature to be explained and experienced to expose its differences to the EBT and to maximize the negativity the transgression originates. In other words, on the one hand *Journey* presents us with the flow of nature approach and on the other with the sombre, polluting and murdering effects of rebelling against it.

The scene begins with Morisaki facing the gate to the Land of the Dead and then noticing a distant sound, a song. The action moves to the top of the crater, above the Gate, where the Quetzalcoatl is producing a constant melodic noise. Shin then explains that the guardians of Agartha sing before dying to ensure their memories travel the world and enter every living being, connecting each of them and the Quetzalcoatl with a greater whole.

This explanation is accompanied by a set of pictures, each emphasising the relation between individual beings and the whole cosmos: a scene of birds flying over the sky; waves on still water transmitting the sound of the song; bees pollinizing flowers and a herd Hellen (a butterfly) over a spider-lily (Figures 3.9, 3.10, 3.11 and 3.12). Every image refers to nature, the cosmos and connect the concepts of unity and wholeness. The link between them is essential to ensure life as this connection is represented as a peaceful but inevitable truth.

Figure 3. 9. Birds fly playfully around clouds in a calm sky

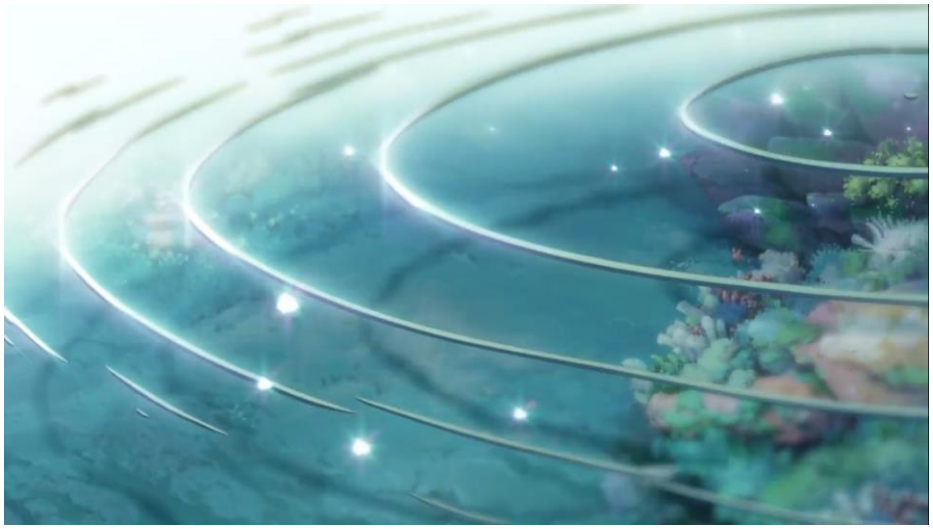

Figure 3. 10. From the corpses of the Quetzalcoatl calm waves cover the water

Figure 3. 11. Bees pollinize the flowers with funerary monuments in the background

Figure 3. 12. A herd Hellen flies away from a spider-lily

This scene is key for the understanding of *Journey'*s engagement with the EBT and its moral argument: death, as part of life, is not only natural but also the opportunity to fully reunite with the cosmos, to cease being singular to join something greater. That is expressed through the Quetzalcoatl's calm song and attitude of a magical powerful being at the edge of death. It is a contrast to Morisaki's and the EBT non-acceptance of what is only part of

the flowing of nature and life itself. This is the stance *Journey* aims to transmit. Therefore, in such a crucial scene the medium puts all its modes to work to emphasize the message. Shin verbalises and explains the ritual while different scenes stress the natural connection between one and the whole. The last mode, the song of the Quetzalcoatl, modulates and leads the affirmation and communication of *Journey* 's moral. Each mode builds up the central moment to transmit a compelling message: the benefits of embracing the flow of nature.

Thus, the scene creates a comfortable calmness that accompanies and accentuates the message of the quiet course of the cosmos. There is also a lack of use of the capacities of the anime such as movement and transitions to manipulate time or depict transformations and metamorphosis in a scene about change and permanence.

However, this is not, I argue, due to Shinkai's lack of expertise. The mimetic relationship between message and medium is a deliberate approach as *Journey* frames the flow of nature as unaltered, unframed, unmediated reality. Thus, by restraining from complex alterations of the depiction of reality the scene constructs a direct relation between an unveiled perception of the cosmos and the way the anime frames it. In other words, as Asuna manages to perceive and be aware of the universe as it

is, the anime represents the world unaltered, exactly as it is minimising the impact of the medium in it.

In any case, *Journey*'s moral stance has been now manifested and emphasized. Asuna is now fully convinced about the flow of nature granting her the power of agency, turning from a passive to active protagonist. Now, she acts instead of just letting things happen to her (Field, 1979). The realisation of the proper and virtuous approach from the Quetzalcoatl has shown Asuna what is right. This transformation leads her to rescue Morisaki from the dangers he has imposed upon himself. She is then swallowed by the Quetzalcoatl, a sign that the authorities of Agartha approve Asuna's decisions and quest. There, inside the Quetzalcoatl, who they now have joined in his last journey, Asuna and Shin reach the gate to the Land of the Dead where they will face Morisaki (Figure 3.13).

Figure 3. 13. The Quetzalcoatl's body disappears to show the children hugging

The Resurrection

Meanwhile, in the Land of the Dead Morisaki meets up with the god Sakuma Vimana. Telepathically, he asks Morisaki to state his wish. There begins the resurrection rite. However, Morisaki takes some time to explain his motivations. He speaks to himself, to Lisa and to the god. He narrates his troubles after Lisa's passing away and his inability to deal with the loss and his decision to rebel against the cosmos.

This is another bewildering moment coming from Morisaki. We know he is desperate to meet up with Lisa, he has been waiting ten years and has abandoned everything to resurrect her. However, now that he can revive Lisa he takes his time, acknowledging the necessity to defend his actions and his whole quest. He is not hesitating, but he is aware that what he is doing is against the established rules that govern his and Agartha's worlds. He is suspending those laws, rebelling against them but only for a limited amount of time and with a restricted objective. But the way he presents himself is key to comprehending the representation of the EBT rebellion through Morisaki's understanding of himself. He has given up maintaining the morality of his quest or the wrongness of the laws he is transgressing. On the contrary, he omits any moral discussion as he knows he will lose there; this ideological debate is not his purpose. Instead, he opts to represent himself as a victim of the

situation, as an individual that tried to live and overcome the loss, which he acknowledges as the right path. But he does not develop on this, suddenly shouting his wish activating the resurrection breaching the physical boundary of this world and the netherworld (figure 3.14).

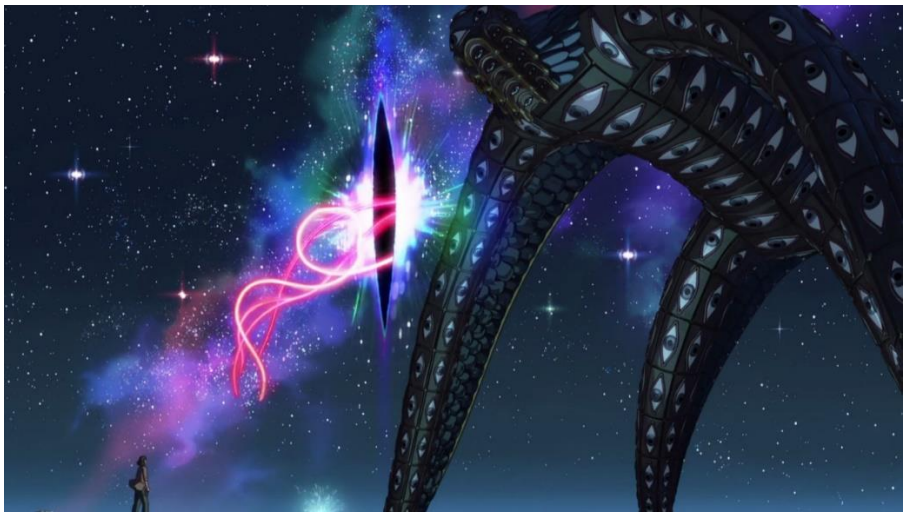

Figure 3. 14. The breach between the world of the living and the dead is finally open

However, the resurrection rite is yet not completed. The price to pay for transgressing the boundaries of life and death is bigger than the pain and suffering of the journey to the Land of the Dead. First, the soul of the dead requires a human vessel, a physical support since its original body has been lost. It is right then, as Morisaki encounters this last obstacle when Asuna appears behind him. With his eyes full of tears, he reminds the girl he told her to stay away, hinting what he has decided to do: sacrifice Asuna for Lisa. The god of Agartha then throws the liquid form of Lisa's soul into Asuna's body killing her (Figure 3.15).

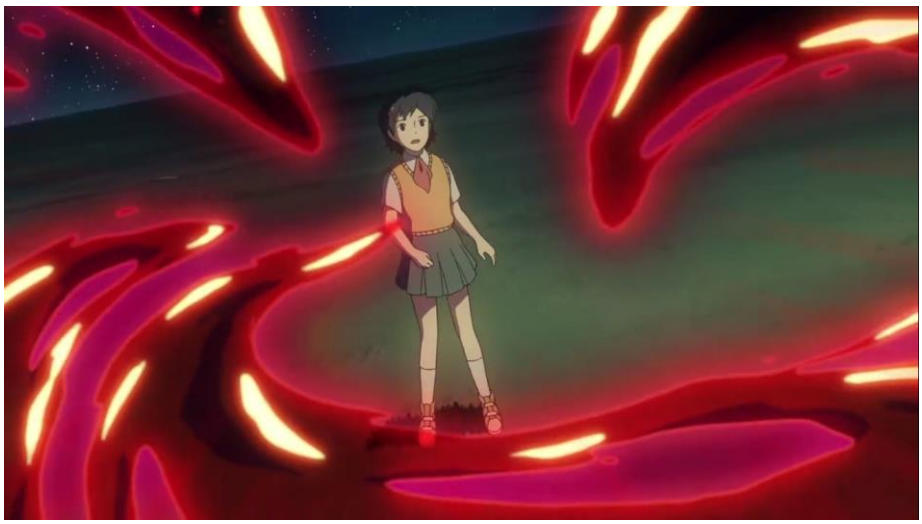

Figure 3. 15. The liquid soul of Lisa is shot at Asuna's body by the god

This characteristic of *Journey*'s EBT poses unresolved questions about the relation between life and death, their transgression and the construction of the related rebellion. First, the requirement of a physical support deals with issues of materiality and intangibility in *Journey*. The necessity of a human body comes from a logical observation after concluding that Sakuma Vimana has the power to return the soul of the dead; but his power ends there and the disappeared body of Lisa must be replaced. It is, however, paradoxical that the uncanny fantasy of *Journey* maintains this specific link to reality, that there is a god capable of opening a breach to the Land of the Dead but not creating a physical form to fully resurrect a human being. This is the coherency the fictional world of Agartha manipulates and changes, but it is Shinkai's prerogative to decide what is possible and what not in his creation. What we can discuss, nevertheless,

is the effect this event has for the EBT in the film and the characterisation of the transgressor and his rebellion.

The sacrificing of Asuna is a crucial moment for her, Morisaki and the EBT as well to the viewer's perception of both the rebel and his quest. In this regard, Morisaki's decision exposes his isolation and stresses his selfishness. Morisaki's isolation is both symptom and cause for his carelessness regarding any other being except himself. By sacrificing Asuna his only link to the world of the living is broken, stressing his obsession with the past and turning him into a murderer, an inhuman character. In fact, by trading Asuna's body for a dead soul, Morisaki is killing her, ending a life.

This is an inevitable consequence and product of the dealing with the polluting influence of death. Morisaki has spent years obsessed with the dead; resources, time and people were sacrificed and betrayed to complete his quest. But also, his self-imposed isolation and final transgression has bridged, connected and breached the boundaries of the two realms contaminating and altering essentially separate planes. Consequently, by transgressing and connecting life and death Morisaki brings life to the dead and death to the living. The working of the cosmos has been subverted.

This liminal position of Morisaki incapacitates him to live a normal existence. Stuck outside the community his attempt to manipulate the cosmos casts him away further from its flow. He is trapped in the past, where he dwells and to which he is extremely attached. His inability to let go and move forward is represented physically and metaphysically by his lack of movement. He does not experience the cycles of time, as does Ojiisan and those who observe and respect the flow of nature, neither does he progress like in modernity (Desser, 1988). In *Journey* moving on also represents existential progression. Morisaki only recovers it after the EBT's failure which situates him in a tiring wait for death. Death triumphs in *Journey* but not as a representation of the ending of life but as its transformation, as part of its eternal flowing.

But the sacrifice has yet another aim: to expose the selfishness and blind obsession leading Morisaki to abandon everything, and everyone, for his cause. Morisaki's selfishness is therefore emphasized through different features being the central one his lack of self-sacrifice, deciding to trade someone else and not himself. By choosing an innocent child he confirms that the quest comes from Morisaki's own inability to find happiness without his lover. *Journey* needs, to make its point, to show that conflictive climax to represent and stress the negativity of the transgression and to fully and definitively delegitimise not only Morisaki's

project but the whole EBT. What *Journey* proposes is not only an excessively demanding transgression but one that is extremely negative.

Through Morisaki's performance, the film stresses and generalizes that those obsessed with such transgression against the universe are indeed insane and dangerous, blinded by their inability to deal with emotional pain. Morisaki's EBT epitomizes the dangers his selfish and egoistic obsession brings to the community. The EBT is then delegitimised based on the harms from not accepting death as natural. *Journey* aims to make these dangers clear, bluntly depicting the transgressor as a rebel against the workings of the cosmos, that is, as a failed adult who cannnot accept humanity's fate. The EBT is attacked on the grounds of presenting it through a character that is virtually impossible to sympathize with. *Journey* forces the transgression stressing that the EBT is utterly wrong and those committing it deserve and will face their punishment.

Consequently, Morisaki shifts from possible hero to an enemy of life and the living. He, a teacher that could as well be Asuna's father-figure stands as synecdoche for all that is wrong with his decadent and absurd generation that neglects and abandons the youth it is supposed to guide and protect (Arai, 2000; Goodman, 2002). It thus parallels Asuna's mother who, for different reasons, leaves her daughter alone for long periods. Like Morisaki,

Asuna's mother shows her doubts against the flowing of nature while dealing with loss and pain. In addition, it is her prolonged absence and abandonment of Asuna that leads the child to an uncontrolled self-isolation and the attraction she feels towards Morisaki. Nevertheless, both attitudes, Morisaki's and Asuna's mother's, are not equidistant as the latter is forced to leave the house because of her responsibilities in maintaining the economic equilibrium of the family. Thus, Asuna's mother is unpunished in the film while Morisaki has yet to pay the price.

Before Morisaki can reach Lisa he is hit by an invisible force coming from the god. A scar then spreads from his right eye and blinds Morisaki (Figure 3.16). He then backs up from the blow breaking the music box he keeps as his only memento from Lisa. Then, Lisa, still in Asuna's body, looks at him as her body absorbs the liquid soul (Figure 3.17). Simultaneously Lisa seems to recover her consciousness, recognizing Morisaki. The resurrection is now completed.

Figure 3. 16. The god attacks Morisaki's eyes transforming his sight

Figure 3. 17. Lisa, now over Asuna's body recognizes Morisaki

Here, however, Morisaki's mutilation stands in a different logic to Asuna's sacrifice within the EBT. If Asuna was a necessary price to pay, Morisaki's disfigurement connects to the punishment of the transgressor. It also comes accompanied by the destruction of the only material memento he holds from Lisa. This small detail punctuates a plot point in Morisaki's mourning, he has ended ten years on craving for his deceased lover. The breaking of the music box marks the end of Morisaki's griefing and denies him

the right to remember Lisa anymore. It also punctuates the violent conclusion to Morisaki's endeavors as he accidentally breaks his own memento. He alone has destroyed everything for his self-imposed quest.

The god's sanction is also symbolic as it is directed against Morisaki's eyes. He does not, however, lose his sight completely, it is transformed. It is through his mutating vision that we witness Asuna's metamorphosis into Lisa (Figure 3.18). This change, and the way the film depicts it, literally through the eyes of the transgressor, symbolises Morisaki's complete delusion. Thus, it is most appropriate that the mutation of Asuna's body is represented through Morisaki's altered and mutilated vision. In the climactic moment when the EBT is finally and successfully performed we witness with and through the transgressor the consummation of his taboo-breaking. At last Morisaki meets with his lover; but at what great cost for him and many others unrelated to his own obsession. Now, the collective repercussions of the EBT makes Shin intervene, as the last defender of life and Agartha's rules.

Figure 3. 18. Asuna is transformed into Lisa depicted through Morisaki's eyes

The Failure of the Resurrection

As Lisa appears Shin runs to the *clavis*, the magic stone that allowed the transmutation. There he attacks it with his dagger to no effect alerting Lisa and Morisaki, who stands up to stop Shin. As Morisaki advances he unsheathes his hunting knife and with a menacing glare approaches Shin with the looking of a decided killer (Figure 3.19). From the information the film has provided about Morisaki and the recent events everything points to the murdering of Shin. However, Morisaki spares the child's life despite Shin threatening Lisa's resurrection and the success of the EBT. There, as Morisaki reaches Shin and puts his knife on his throat he starts begging the boy to stop because "Lisa has done nothing bad" (1.18.44). Shin will answer that the living are more important finally breaking the *clavis*. Let's now focus first on Morisaki's argument.

Figure 3. 19. Morisaki approaches Shin to stop him from rescuing Asuna

It is while menacing Shin that Morisaki gives his last justification for the EBT. This time he points at the injustice that has been committed, but he frames it as an injustice against innocent Lisa, taking away any responsibility from his own acts. Thus, Morisaki is justifying his rebellion against the flow of nature, against the rules of the cosmos that Agarthians venerate and respect. But Lisa, as Morisaki points out, has done nothing bad, she is an innocent young woman, making her death utterly unjust. He is therefore challenging the working of the laws of the cosmos, its logic. By having to face such unexpected loss he questions the sense of a world in which the natural order is sometimes altered or transgressed by nature itself.

As Morisaki stresses throughout the film a young woman being taken away suspends the logical course of the world. A world that shows itself as unreliable, impermanent and unstable and in

which the rules of who lives and dies can be modified leaving us, mortals, defenseless, helpless. It is in that world where Morisaki dwelled for ten years. Nothing is sure in an existence in which even nature breaks its own laws, where everything could forever end. It is in the breaking of the world's apparent rules, in the redefinition of the laws of nature that the EBT might be redefined to return that balance broken by the cosmos. Morisaki is thus rebelling against an authority he believes unjust, that breaks its own rules in an unfair existence.

And yet, this restoring justice with the universe does not seem enough of a justification for having transgressed the boundaries of life and death. The living, Shin says, are more important. They are more relevant than the dead, than Morisaki's rebellion against the cosmos. What *Journey* advocates, through its opposition to Morisaki, no matter how unjust the working of the universe can appear to us, we are bound to accept it, to learn to deal with it whether we understand and agree with it or not. It is in that liminality, in the ambiguity of the defilement of his quest, that Morisaki loses his capacity to act, to perform any crime. In fact, despite him trading Asuna for Lisa, it is Sakuma Vimana, the god, who acts and kills her. Morisaki has stated the wish but he has lost all his agency, he cannot create or destroy.

In this regard, Morisaki's inability to kill Shin stresses his loss of agency, even he can still inflict pain and transmit death. Morisaki

is thus a deeply troubled character, full of doubts even in his blind obsession. He has doomed Asuna but now, facing actual murder he is incapable of acting, *de facto* allowing the boy to stop the resurrection of Lisa. The motivations behind Morisaki's passivity might be the most problematic and puzzling of the entire film. But considering he is the only representative of the EBT his decisions, hesitations and ambitions are key to understand *Journey*'s EBT and its connotations for the conversation. In this regard, there are two turning and opposing points: the sacrifice of Asuna and his pardon of Shin. If trading Asuna allowed the EBT at the cost of the greatest amorality of the whole process, not stopping and killing Shin reversed it. Morisaki is thus saved from his actions by not acting at all. Thus, only by not doing something and letting others amend his actions can he be redeemed. Morisaki has failed as a teacher, an adult and as human, and is deposed from any agency. He is among the living dead whose presence alters both planes.

The opposite shift is observed in Asuna's new ontological, existential and moral approach. As the *clavis* explodes the action is transported back to her. She is now in Lisa's room accompanied by Shun and Mimi (figure 3.20). Shun asks her if she is already leaving to which she answers by smiling back at them and saying goodbye. This is a short but key scene to comprehending Asuna's personal journey and rite of passage.

Figure 3. 20. Asuna wakes up in Lisa's room with Shun and Mimi

Asuna's mourning, loss and pain, which have accompanied her through her life, disappear once she embraces the flow of nature. Therefore, this encounter allows her to physically and directly separate from Shun, whose death activated Asuna's EBT motivations. She has the opportunity, now she is strong and mature enough to say goodbye and punctuate the end of the separation rite allowing a reincorporation to the community, to the world and the cosmos. Asuna is thus proving that her experiencing of the Quetzalcoatl song, her understanding of the flow of nature and her construction as a human being has been successfully completed. She is liberated from the burden of the past, filling her with relief and higher comprehension of the cosmos.

Right after Asuna leaves the room the *clavis* explodes, repeating an image shown before and marking the simultaneity of the

events. It is thus unclarified if it is Asuna's decisions, Shin's determination or their combination that allows the *clavis* to collapse. In any case the resurrection has failed. Morisaki realizes it and runs towards a fainting Lisa whom he manages to grab. Both lovers hold each other in the last moments of Lisa's second death (Figure 3.21). They interchange a few words as Lisa begs Morisaki to find happiness and he answers by saying "I love you… I loved you!" (1.49.47). Lisa's liquid soul explodes leaving Asuna's lying in front of a crying Morisaki.

Figure 3. 21. Lisa and Morisaki separate after the failure of the resurrection

It is then, forced to face the end and failure of his quest and witnessing his wife's death in front of and because of him, that Morisaki realizes the truth about his mourning. Then, Morisaki comes to terms with the inevitability of death. No matter how high was the price he paid, and all the years he committed to the EBT quest and the pain it caused him. The dead remain dead, the

past cannot be altered and time continues its flowing, inalterable, fixed and unforgiving.

This realization is expressed through Morisaki's last words to Lisa and the changing of the tense "I love you… I loved you!". His using of the past while telling Lisa about his love signifies and punctuates a final acceptance and realisation that the reality he once knew, his relationship and the person with whom he had it is now gone. His love for Lisa, as with his memories and plans, only exist in the past, in another plane. The shock of turning into a killer, betraying Asuna's trust and facing the unnatural reincarnation of Lisa leads him to eventually face that reality: what he once lived and loved is no more. Therefore, the rewording of his sentence presents a plot point, punctuated by his verbalization of a previous Morisaki who lived in a time that vanished long ago and a new Morisaki who faces, however imperfectly, the reality in front of him.

But here is it relevant to stress that, as Asuna with Mimi and Shun, Morisaki was not present when Lisa passed away and he never witnesses her funeral or saw her dead. It is now, thanks to the failed EBT, that he is forced to be present at Lisa's departure. Just as Asuna says farewell to her friends Morisaki has the chance, or better, is forced to say goodbye to his vanishing lover. In the last moment with Lisa Morisaki manages to pull himself together and accept what he has been previously denying, that

Lisa only dwells in the past. Then, the grammatical verbalization of the past punctuates both the end of the EBT and the *Journey*'s plot, with the final conversation as epilogue.

Shin then approaches Morisaki and Asuna as the Sakuma Vimana takes off, leaving the mortals alone as the time of the supernatural has passed. Finally, he reaches them and Morisaki begs Shin to kill him. Morisaki has, then, given up on living. It is now made clear that to him the EBT equated to his own life and now, without it, without the possibility to see Lisa alive, there is nothing else for him but dying. He does not seem to ask to be killed to meet his lover but rather he is motivated by two main reasons: first, his desperation after everything he worked for vanishied in front of him. Second, he seems to have realized all the wrong he has done now his project is gone; a project that lead him to sacrifice Asuna, the only person that has showed any love for him. It is then, out of guilt that Morisaki decides he should be punished, killed instead to pay for all his crimes against the laws of nature.

Shin, however, refuses stating that he had heard “a voice asking him to live, to accept the loss” and that “he should have heard it too” (1:50:36). That is, he finishes, “the curse humans must endure” (1:50:39). Then, as the Sakuma Vimana disappears in the sky Asuna is awakened by Morisaki’s tears on her face. She then embraces her teacher and replies to Shin, “but I believe it is

also a blessing", her words accompanied by the broken music box among flowers and grass (Figure 3.22).

Figure 3. 22. Lisa's music box allegorizes the defeat of the transgression

Shin, therefore, refuses to support any of Morisaki's plans related to the EBT, murdering being as unnatural and punishable as the EBT itself. Morisaki must embrace his fate, his humanity and what that means. And in part, being a human, according to Shin, standing as representative of Agartha, means accepting the pain no matter how hard it seems. Asuna, however, offers a much more constructive approach, a better understanding of the flow of nature. In the end, these children represent a perfect balance that summarizes the two levels of Agartha's truth (Shin the most basic, Asuna the most positive). Therefore, it is Asuna, who better encapsulates the ontological proposal of Agartha, and thus of *Journey*. She, unlike Shin, fully understands the positive outcome of the limitations imposed upon us, mortals. To her, loss,

pain and feeling them is a blessing, something to treasure. She does not question that it might be a curse, too, that there are two sides to every event, but not denying them and their ambiguity is the only and best way to live. To sum up, while Shin gives up to the unavoidable fate of humans Asuna approaches it embracing that limit to our existence and the unknown possibilities while transcending into the great wholeness.

With that meditation the film ends and the credits start, showing an injured Morisaki going back to the village accompanied by the children, although eventually Asuna decides to return home. There she is shown preparing for graduation, happy and peaceful. Thus, *Journey* makes sure to emphasize the positive outcome of Asuna's journey. Despite all the pain, the suffering and even having a near-death experience visiting and experiencing Agartha has allowed her to find peace with the world, with her own existence showing her the proper and moral way to live. On the contrary, the EBT ends up defeated and portrayed negatively from the beginning of the film to the climatic end of the quest.

But the EBT is not the only theme at stake here, relatable projections of similar ambitious and fanatic attitudes are hinted throughout the film. As *Ojiisan* narrates before the conversation on the EBT, Agartha's current state is due to constant invasions to take advantage of its richness (Figure 3.23). Morisaki is thus situated in that same logic of foreigners that pillaged and used

Agartha regardless of the consequences of their obstinate and fanatical acts. If despicable characters such as Adolf Hitler or Josef Stalin appropriated Agartha's material goods, the same can be said about Morisaki's attitude towards Agartha's metaphysical and epistemological powers.

Figure 3. 23. All the leaders that have ruined Agartha driven by ambition and greed

Journey thus uses the EBT also as an allegory of the attitude and consequences of that rebellious behavior. The fanatical use of Agartha and constant exploitation by strangers taking advantage of foreign lands connects Morisaki's project and those of previous incursions. The result is the same: pain, loss and defeat. But Morisaki is relieved by his failure; a failure motivated by the intervention of the children and his lack of agency. The unsuccessful EBT ends up saving not only Asuna but also Morisaki who is shown laughing and calm for the first time once

his quest has been stopped. In the end, the laws of the cosmos prevail against any act of rebellion against them.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how *Journey* and the animated medium have participated in the EBT Conversation. Through the analysis of the depiction of the EBT I argued that *Journey* has a main aim: to delegitimize and attack the EBT on the grounds of the perils and defilement of its rebellion and transgression against the laws of nature. Thus, *Journey* aims to reinforce what it considers the only morally acceptable ontological and existential approach: to embrace and submit to the laws of the universe.

In that logic, *Journey* is a discursive and narrative attempt to make sense of a complex context. In the Second Lost Decade, after every category and boundary was up to be challenged and questioned *Journey* aims to find, construct and put together an existential alternative to the liquified ontological landscape. The flowing of nature does not represent something immutable and oppressive, but a truth that works beyond our human capacities. It is not, *per se*, an anti-humanistic approach, but at the same time it emphasizes humanity's limitations and restricts our power to a fraction in the working of the cosmos. That there is a force above us controlling and correcting our mistakes that is celebrated, embraced as positive. As Asuna concludes in the end

of the film, death is a blessing, it is a phenomenon that surpasses our agency, our control.

Agartha is then the otherworldly place where our problems, our worries and anxieties unravel and meet their end. Here Agartha, as fantasy is not a break from the ordinary but its continuation, or even its amplification (Napier, 1996: 5). *Journey* thus aims to create and construct an effective and emotional discourse that amplifies its impact through fantasy and anime. On the one hand, fantasy bears an essential role for human discourses and hermeneutics. Through the fantastic humans can adapt, through their imagination, to anything, to chaos and lack of order (Langer, 1948: 233). What you cannot imagine and construct is what you fear, as it is beyond our hermeneutic limits (Geertz, 1973). Agartha is not the realm of escapism, nor a place disconnected from the ordinary, but the ordinary taken to its limits.

In regard to anime, although the use of the medium by Shinkai is, compared to his other works, conservative, the role of animation is key to understanding the construction of the story. Before the resurrection rite, the use of anime in *Journey* is mostly filmic, cinematographic, that is, the way the story is narrated could just as easily have been a live action film. This, as I have argued, aims to present a mimetic relation to the calmness and flowing of the story while narrating Asuna’s journey.

It is only in the intense event of the EBT that Shinkai uses anime's properties to emphasize the uncanny and supernatural of the events unchained. Transformation, and its depiction, are performed through the transposition of frames allowing bodies to juxtapose and change increasing the feeling of boundary blending, of the liquification of the material and our perception of it. This, apart from an aesthetic, or visual impact, also transmits uncertainty, a clashing of planes and the alteration of both reality and fantasy. It is then, in that climatic event that anime not only delivers the uncanny of the scene but also contrasts it with the calmness and tranquility of the previous moments in which Asuna joins the flow of life. The closeness of both scenes thus emphasizes the opposition of both existential approaches. The EBT is defilement, darkness and agitation while the flow of life is tranquility and peace. With that use of the medium Shinkai aims to construct and convince about the benefits, the need to hold onto something real: our subordination to nature, but also our belonging to something essential, something beyond human's reach.

Journey then uses anime to represent the different concepts and worldviews central to its narrative. There, the flow of nature is depicted aiming for a mimetic relation between reality and its representation. For example, in the scene of the Quetzalcoatl song the shots increase a sense of calmness, of the events being

witnessed as they happen and not through any medium. That is, as I argue, mimesis, an exact and unmediated representation of the flow of nature. This, therefore, emphasises the sense of awakening. Joining the truth of the cosmos and its flowing allows us to perceive the world as it is. There the anime stresses that state in which our sight, our perception is not blinded anymore.

On the other hand, the representation of the EBT and its unravelling is portrayed using all the modes of anime, especially its capacity to show transformation and the uncanny. It is then, as the resurrection rite finally takes place when *Journey* tells the events through the transgressor's eyes, through its mutating vision. Change, metamorphosis and illusion are equated to the EBT, to the blurred mind and sight of Morisaki. Anime then is used to both express the mimetic representation of the world's truth and the obsessive tendencies of the EBT. That is an interrogation on the role of media as it can both portray what is real and beneficial and what is evil and wrong. *Journey* uses anime to emphasise what is good and bad, aiming to prove that there are some true and solid boundaries to be defended.

This confirmation of the absoluteness of death and its boundaries opens a breach in the anti-essentialist trending of the Lost Decades. If something remains stable, more categories can be confirmed, if humanity's power and works are limited there might be more boundaries that surpass our control. Death is the first

and most absolute fixed thing, it is the beginning of the universal categories, of the workings of powers above humanity's decisions, aspirations and weaknesses. Death is a blessing, as Asuna says, for it marks the end of the liquification of reality and morality. Not everything goes in *Journey*'s worldview, not everything is up to debate and negotiation. There is something essential and important that is universal and impossible to change. After all, there is something stable and, in such a painful and insecure world, this is a relief.

The EBT is then attacked for it its metaphorical nature. It is not only a discussion of life and death boundaries but also an abstraction, a synecdoche of everything it represents. The EBT is the ideology of working against nature, against humanity's limitation. Death is the only thing that remains unreachable for human manipulation. It is pure, as it is impossible to alter, a force of nature that amends our mistakes. But the EBT is more than that, is also the ideology of individualism, of selfishness and relationlessness. To perform the EBT means not to despise the community but to neglect it. Obsession with personal pain and individual desires lead to the destruction of the group as everyone pushes forward their personal agendas. This selfish, self-centered individualism is what *Journey* attacks when it discusses the EBT.

Journey, therefore, is almost a response to *Alchemist*, the opposite approach to the EBT. As I have argued, *Alchemist* made the decision to delve into the complexities and paradoxical ambiguities of the EBT. Through its 27 volumes many characters joined the EBT conversation to show different perspectives and approaches. The Elrics' quest structures this polyphonic conversation in which Arakawa devised the dramatic tension around the question on how to resolve the EBT, how to fix the transgression once we experience its consequences. After much pain and suffering the story reaches a compromise, the transgressors need to re-join the community, but the collective must change too, to address the problems that lead them astray in the first place.

Journey, on the other hand, proposes a different project: to delegitimise the EBT and warn the audience of its defiling consequences. To do so, it opposes the category of the rebel to the authority of the flow of nature. The essential rebel acts against the organisation and flow of nature, trying to subvert it for his own benefit. Through the different encounters, events and characters' decisions the film shows how erroneous and perilous the EBT, the obstinacy to work against the laws of the universe, is. The medium, as can be seen in the Quetzalcoatl's scene, emphasizes the mimetic construction of reality while exploring the flow of life framing it as true and accurate. Thus, the moral

stance of *Journey* connects to conceptualisations of what it maintains to be right, proper or ethical through its medial depiction.

Now, between the two opposing poles, one accepting the ambiguity of the theme and one working against it, the last medium this PhD studies, the videoludic, proposes a different approach. It is due to the characteristics of computer games, their interactivity, responsive capacities and performative modes that the game *Shadow of the Colossus* constructs a different experience. If *Alchemist* and *Journey* aimed to explore the EBT transmitting different approaches to the theme, *Shadow* forces the player, its audience, to make the decisions themselves. But, as I argue in the following chapter, the choices regarding the EBT in *Shadow* are an illusion, you either play the EBT or you do not play at all. There are no alternatives, there is no progression in the game without transgression. The illusion of the player's agency is therefore used as a key element in its portray of the EBT. The dichotomy is forced clearly constraining the transgressor to constantly choose between action or non-action. The EBT rebel is in constant struggle, always battling against himself and his decisions, a situation that alienates him from the community. This is a shared feature of the EBT in *Shadow,* where the illusion of agency accompanies the game from beginning to end.

Chapter IV. Tragic Transgressions in *Shadow of the Colossus*

In the previous chapters I have addressed the EBT as represented by the media of manga and anime. Both examples, *Alchemist* and *Journey*, have shown different approaches to and engagements with the EBT theme. If *Alchemist* embraced the liquidity and ambiguity of both its central tension and worldview, *Journey* aimed to offer a solid and unquestionable moral approach. Now I approach the computer game medium.

The computer game medium offers a new approach to the EBT conversation. This is a medium that requires from the player an active role in unravelling the text. This is paramount in the debate of the EBT as now the player has the chance to actively participate in the transgression. However, the way this engagement is experienced is channelled by the game design (its mechanics and narrative). Consequently, this chapter studies the experience that *Shadow of the Colossus (Shadow* hereafter) constructs. The focus is on *Shadow'*s engagement with the EBT conversation and its meditation on the role of computer games as communicative devices.

Released in 2005 *Shadow* proposes only one quest to the player: to resurrect Wander's, the avatar, lover Mono. He thus embarks on a mission that offers no alternatives, no distractions or

possible redemption if committed to it. There are only two possible options in *Shadow*, to play and transgress or not play at all. *Shadow* deals in its entirety with that process, with the committing of that essential rebellion and the tensions it brings up. The transgression then takes the form of solitude, sacrifice, violence and murder. Wander gives everything to resurrect his lover. There is no external questioning of the morality of his actions, even with all the hints and warnings about the nature, the outcome and consequences of the quest. The opportunity to decide on the EBT comes as an illusion as there is no choosing at all, you either accept the quest and play or you leave the game, refusing to commit that transgression.

This chapter explores the main characteristics of the EBT in *Shadow*: the tension between the absolute freedom and agency in a game that, on the contrary, restrains and fixes the player into one quest and one only choice: to commit the EBT. To emphasise this illusion the game offers mechanics that increase the feeling of unrestrained but futile freedom and the ability to choose within the fictional world. This opportunity to decide for ourselves on the EBT and the intersecting themes is a deception. There is no choosing for a player who is instrumentalised by the avatar, the agent in the game-world representing us within the game-world. The EBT is a force strong enough to overwhelm everything, including our control over the game.

From this analysis I argue that, while *Shadow* allows the player to experience the EBT it has a clear aim and intention that emerges from its deep ambiguity and obscure distribution of information. That main intention is to show how evil, dangerous and immoral the EBT is. Therefore, all its mechanics, the design choices and narrative work in that direction: to convince the player of how wrong and perilous it is, even though it is what the game is forcing them to do.

The chapter is organised into four sections: first section addresses the main controversies in games studies, why they are relevant to the study of the EBT in *Shadow* and how this contributes to these debates. The second section aims to present and explain the main methods and concepts that guide the analysis of *Shadow* in this chapter. The third section presents a critical description of the EBT in *Shadow*, structured on the pattern organising the gameplay. The fourth section then focuses on the mechanics structuring *Shadow* and the ethical issues this design raises. To do that it draws from philosophical debates and vocabulary regarding ethics, morality and moral dilemmas, terms all relevant to the understanding of *Shadow's* approach to the EBT conversation. Finally, in the concluding section I discuss the interwoven meditation between the role of computer games as creator of experiences and the decision to engage in the EBT conversation from this medium. There, the theme of

transgressing life and death boundaries serves to question matters such as free will, the illusion of freedom and moral responsibility of individuals towards the community and the world surrounding them. In that regard the EBT not only gives *Shadow* the tools to discuss the role of the videoludic medium but also constructs a new kind of engagement that forces the player to take part in the conversation constrained by the mechanical and narrative design. *Shadow* is then not an empowering text but the representation of the obsessive prison generated from a selfish individualist isolation.

The Study of Computer Games

A computer game is, simply put, "a game played with the primary aid of computing power" (Sageng, Fossheim and Larsen, 2012: 4). The category then applies to "any forms of computer based entertainment software […] using any electronic platform" (Frasca, 2001: 4). But a main, or perhaps the main, characteristic of computer games is that "they exist to be played" which connects them to previous non-computerized forms of play (Larsen, 2012: 11).

In fact, the debate around differentiating traditional from computer games has been widespread. From this relation, computer games were understood as an activity marked off from any other, a foundational argument by ludologist (a researcher on games) Johan Huizinga (1950). This approach, popular at the

beginning of computer games studies, has since been challenged arguing that “the playing of computer games […] stand in various kinds of continuity with other activities and practices, with which they are integrated in different ways” (Larsen, 2012: 11). This second argument is supported by studies on the phenomenology of the gaming experience, the corporeality of gaming and the essential role of emotions in that process (Klevjer, 2012; Lankoski; 2012). According to these, computer games are a link to the real world, permeating each other’s experiences.

Another key characteristic of computer games was discussed by Jesper Juul, in *Half Real* (2005) one of the foundational texts of the discipline. There, Juul defines games as

> “a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable” (ibid: 36).

That makes computer games different from previous games as they are “played using computer power, where the computer upholds the rules of the game and the game is played using a video display” (ibid: viii). From this approach rules are the key concept to understand computer games. They are the “real”

element of games, connected to the fictional element and the game world (Sicart, 2009: 25).

Computer games are, therefore, both fictional worlds and systems that interrelate as their rules force and guide the experience of the game-world. By rules, I mean “the inner, formal structure of games” (Salen and Zimmerman, 2005: 125). Rules should then be unambiguous, explicit, common to every player, fixing and binding. But they also have operational values as “they limit what players can do […]; they create the winning conditions and the limits and boundaries of the games (Sicart, 2009: 28). Then, by games as systems we refer to their game structure which includes both the game’s rule and the simulation rules (Aarseth, 2003). The game is then a process with a structure formed by its rules and that only takes place when players experience it. In other words, rules create the game and the fictional world contains it (Sicart, 2009: 33).

Consequently, games are ontological objects and experiences, in fact, “they are objects designed to be experienced, and they can only exist fully in that process” (Sicart, 2009: 30). Thus, the only way to comprehend computer games and their capabilities comes from their study as experiences and their ergodic nature. This experiencing is, in computer games studies, contained in the term “gameplay”. Sicart (2009) defines gameplay as the phenomenological experience of interacting with a computer

game (35) and Salen and Zimmerman define this experience as the interaction with a system from which meaning is created through “participation with designed choices and procedures (2005: 60). This experience is then allowed and constrained by the rules of the game and its world. The rules of the simulation the experience is patterned as they foster and punish certain behaviour.

Thus, the main focus of game studies should be on these rules and how they are presented to the player (Sicart, 2009: 37). It is through this interest that we can understand what the game-world looks like and, more importantly, what choices and constraints are presented to the player, as well as what they mean. In other words, the focus is on what experience is the game aiming to construct, and, consequently, what moral and ethical experience it presents.

A second major point of discussion in games studies is concerned with the relevance of computer games and their study. There is agreement, nonetheless, on their innovative nature, form and capacities as a new expressive and communicative force. The importance of computer games comes from their unique dimensions and characteristics, the challenges to design and designers as well as the creative possibilities of these artistic expressions (Sageng, Fossheim and Larsen, 2012: 2). The medium innovates the forms in which we communicate and

experience play, but also in the way this relates to other activities and the real world acting as a connected extension to it. They, therefore, occupy a new and distinctive plane in human life differing “from traditional representational media by mediating meaning, knowledge and experience through the participants’ own actions” (ibid).

Nevertheless, computer games are still connected to traditional media forms on the questions they deal with, in the conversations they take part in. Many of the perennial interrogations about individuals, the environment and their relations are then reproduced and manifested in a new form by the connection between player and computer game. These debates concern various planes of human life including aesthetics, ethics or metaphysics but now with a medium that demands the active enrolment and participation of the consumer with the text who guides, allows and restricts the experience (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Therefore, studying computer games allows us, and requires us, to critically “address traditional philosophical questions” (Saeng, Fossheim and Larsen, 2012: 3), a task that furthers and develops the study of aesthetics, ethics and metaphysics.

Thus, the link between the real and the virtual or fictional world remains through the player and the awareness that the game is more conventionally organised through rules and the principles of narrative story-telling (Atkins, 2012: 139). The attraction of the

game-world is not due to a confusion between virtual and non-virtual worlds but because of the seductive, instead of deceptive, fictional form. That is what makes the gameplay entertaining, because it allows for extraordinary experiences due to the game's content and form that evades the reflection of mundane existence (ibid: 145). In a way, the uniqueness and interest of computer games is how they stand in a liminal position between two planes. On the one hand they are permeated with references to this world influencing it back through intertextual polyphony. On the other they construct impossible, extraordinary and supernatural quests that cannot be performed outside of their virtual worlds. They thus allow for a new and unique form of experience and relation to our own world, existence and ontologies.

This relates to the concern of morality and ethics in computer games, or computer games as ethical systems. Since computer games are a human construct, their rules and the overall experiences they create are open to ethical and moral scrutiny. A game, Sicart (2009) argues, is responsible for the experience it permits, from the behaviours it allows, facilitates and encourages through its gameplay. Designers, therefore, are accountable for what they allow or manipulate the player to do; but so are the players. Behaviour in a game does not work on the same plane as on the non-fictional world, but they are both

connected. The actions we perform in a game only affect the game world and are restrained to it. They are real actions but within a ludic and fictional environment. However, games simulate reality, although a highly abstracted one, and they have ethical properties that determine how they are to be experienced and the meaning that can be extracted from the act of playing them.

Not all games, however, deal or represent ethical dilemmas or raise ethical issues. But understanding the morality and ethics of computer games is relevant for this chapter as *Shadow* not only deals with these questions but its game-world and gameplay are based on the ethical dilemmas that make up its experience. It is a text that engages itself and the player in key debates around computer games, the building of fantasy worlds and our agency in them as well as meditating on the possibilities and constraints of the medium. The player in *Shadow* is allowed to commit the ultimate transgression but the choice is a delusion. The constant interrogations are then subtly proposed by a game that does not seem to force any ideology or judgment on the player. It is the mechanics, the rules of the game and the complicity of the player that lead to the questioning of his actions and motivations in a fictional world of ambiguity and insecurities that ends as inconclusively and uncannily as it started. To study the progression and development of the gameplay experience the

next section introduces the main theoretical concepts guiding this analysis of the EBT in *Shadow*.

Experiencing Transgression through Computer Games

Shadow has attracted the attention of academics and non-academics in the form of reviews, critical analysis and personal reflections of the game. One of the first academic accounts on *Shadow* appears in Miguel Sicart's study of violence and evil in computer games (2009b). In it, Sicart uses Hannah Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil" to explain the use of computer games to explore and perform unethical actions (Arendt, 1994). Sicart argues *Shadow* is one of the best examples of the use of the banality of evil as a game in which players would make unethical decisions without understanding them as ethical choices (197). This approach is extended by Sicart in *The Ethics of Computer Games* (2009). In chapter 6, Sicart uses *Shadow* to explain two concepts regarding ethical game design: closed ethical game design and subtracting ethics. In a closed ethical game design:

> the game creates an ethical experience in which the player cannot implement her values beyond the constraints of the game. The game is designed to create a set of possible actions with different moral

> weights […] without the possibility of contributing her values to the game itself (214).

The second concept is subtracting ethics:

> the process of creating a game that has ethical choices made by an ethical agent at the core of its fictional universe by means of gameplay mechanics. Subtracting ethics creates a moral experience, but leaves the ethical reasoning to the player, thus respecting their presence as moral agents in the networked ethical system of computer games (215-6).

A year later, 2010, Óliver Pérez Latorre presented the first extended study of *Shadow*. In it he focuses on the enunciative dimension of the mechanics and the narrative of computer games to decipher their message. After a thorough analysis Pérez Latorre concludes that *Shadow* is a tale about love, futility and repetitive failure. This same approach is used by Nicholas Fortugno (2011) who coins the term “futile interactivity”. Fortugno applies this theoretical concept to the study of the experience of the game and the relevance it gives computer games as emotionally powerful communicative devices.

Finally, in 2015 Tom Cole proposed an analysis of *Ico* and *Shadow* from cognitive theory with a focus on emotions. In his

article, Cole argues that both games use different tools to arouse curiosity and mystery to increase the player involvement. The player is encouraged to create an emotional bond with the game and especially with their only companions. Different tools such as animation, colour, sound and control mechanics are implemented to increase the emotional impact of the story and the relations built within the game world.

These different approaches to *Shadow* show not only an extended interest in the game but also the variety of disciplines that have studied the experience it builds. Nevertheless, it is interesting that none of them refer to each other. This is even more relevant as many of them are not only compatible but would have benefited from each other. In this chapter I refer to them as the combination of mechanic and narrative dimensions are key to comprehending the main tension in *Shadow*. My approach benefits from these previous engagements as they provide useful terminology and mechanics focused studies. I build on them, their methodologies and attempts to comprehend how *Shadow* works and what it aims to transmit. They lack, however, a holistic aim to understand the overall tension of the game and, moreover, *Shadow*'s relation to its cultural context. Therefore, to fill in this gap in the literature, I propose a focus on the design of the game, its engagement with the EBT and the way affection

and emotion is modulated by its mechanics, which I explain in the following section.

Analysing Transgression in Computer Games

When studying the construction of the EBT in *Shadow* one of the main issues to discuss is the active involvement and necessary performance of the player. In opposition to other media forms, *Shadow* demands the player perform the EBT if s/he wants to play. This decision is, however, channelled and structured through the rules and sequential organisation the designers have set up in the gameplay. There, the necessity, or opportunity, to commit a transgression raises questions about the responsibility of the player, but also emotions such as guilt and trauma from loss and separation. This section presents and proposes a set of methods and approaches for studying *Shadow*, its engagement in the EBT conversation and its contribution to the computer game medium.

First, my approach to *Shadow* comes from game design theory which focuses on the game as an object to be experienced (Sicart, 2009). Design theory focuses on the creation of successful ludic experiences with the use of different arts and technologies and it considers how game designers think about their practice and what techniques they use in the process of creating rules and game worlds (ibid, 37-38). In that endeavour, game designers try to predict and map the way their product will be experienced. In my case I will use different sources available,

from the gameplay and artbook ICO Studio released in Japan discussing the creative process and the way they expect *Shadow* to be experienced, to different interviews and comments from director Ueda Fumito.

However, to complete the second dimension of computer games (its experience) I propose an analysis of its gameplay from the point of view of an "implied player", one who always follows the rules to achieve the goals of the game, an abstract tool that helps us understand how games are designed, the main concern of this chapter. However, I recognise the possibilities for alternative gameplay and forms of resisting or even bending the mechanics of the game, a good example of which is the blog by Nomad, a hacker who has dedicated more than a decade to explore the entirety of the game (http://nomads-sotc-blog.blogspot.com/).

Thus, to study the design of *Shadow* I refer to what James Ash (2012) defines as affective design, a term related to the production and construction of computer games. This concept comes from Bernard Stiegler's (2010) "retentional economy", which studies the transmission of human knowledge through the relationship between affect and attention of human memory. This, when applied to computer games, helps us to understand the techniques designers use to captivate and manipulate attention. The aim of this focus is, therefore, to understand how designers modulate affect to ensure a successful gameplay

experience, one not only fun to play but also meaningful to interact with. To study that Ash proposes three concepts to understand how affective design works to transmit “the potential for affect through a range of technical systems and environments” (Ash, 2012: 3).

Developing on that, attention is relevant for the construction of computer games as it focuses on how they are designed to be experienced. This comes from the understanding that games are consumed based on the manipulation of players’ passions and enthusiasms, on the capture and management of their emotions through sensory design (Thrift, 2006: 286). Computer games, as any product, are designed to appeal to the senses in different ways (Berlant, 2008; Featherstone, 2010). They are, as Shaviro (2013) argues, machines for generating affect, to extract value from the affective relation created between player and game.

Attention, therefore, becomes a central point for the design of computer games, and consequently, to comprehend how a computer game is designed and how it works, we need to study how attention is captured and modulated to generate particular forms of affect (Ash, 2012: 5).

These concepts for studying attention and the construction of emotional reactions and experiences in the game guide the analysis of *Shadow*, structured following the methodology of content analysis proposed by Mike Schmierbach (2009). In his

article Schmierbach argues that one challenge in analysing computer games is their length. It is then necessary to structure and cut the gameplay into different stages to be studied later. This necessity comes as an essential pre-requisite to the study of products that might last for days of gameplay. *Shadow*, however, provides a clear and differentiated episodic pattern and organisation. The game is composed of sixteen encounters with the colossi plus a final battle where the player's avatar is turned into a colossus. Each of these encounters is organised in two stages: the finding of and killing of the enemy. These well-differentiated stages aid the fragmentation of the game as this internal organisation guides the analysis of *Shadow*. This decision is, however, not based solely on the narratological structuration of the game but on its construction and manipulation of the gameplay experience. That is, the feeling of progression is marked by the different cut-scenes and the increase in power that allows Wander to succeed in his encounters with the Colossi. This sequential development constructs an impression of moving forward while it punctuates the episodic nature of the quest, since the end of every encounter implies a restart from the shrine and a reproduction of the pattern: find-kill-repeat.

Last, considering the main dramatic tension and theme of *Shadow*, the EBT, and the way the game approaches to it, I consider it relevant to approach *Shadow* as an ethical system. I

thus focus on *Shadow's* exploration on the capacities of the medium to create ethical experiences and meditations on our ontologies, existence and the consumption of computer games. The whole ludic experience of *Shadow* is structured by a core ethical conflict based on its protagonist, Wander, non-acceptance of the death of his love and his rebellion against the rules of the community, the authority and the cosmos. Wander is aware of the possible disastrous consequences of his actions, but he does not care. *Shadow's* experience is therefore based on the player's involvement in the conflict, to distance her/him from the EBT rebellion but to maintain the interest of completing the transgression. The following section explores the experiencing of the EBT through *Shadow's* ludic and narrative organisation.

Transgressing the Boundaries of Life and Death in Shadow of the Colossus

The complexity of narrating *Shadow* comes from the intertwining of both its story and gameplay, that is, between the fixed structure and its variable and unique construction by the player. There is, however, a main and overall similar progression every player of *Shadow* experiences. The account I present here follows the flow of information as it is presented to the player, to better understand how it is constructed and how this influences the consumption of *Shadow*.

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In a mountain range covered by dark clouds a lonely figure rides his black horse through narrow passes carrying a shape covered by a robe. The rider passes forests and empty plains until he reaches a gigantic wall. In front of him there is a breach he crosses entering a deserted land. There lies a high narrow bridge that leads to a castle of fantastical architecture. The rider enters the castle as a black stone gate opens showing a dark tunnel his horse refuses to enter. Descending through a spiral ramp he reaches a wide room flanked by uncanny statues. The rider descends and holds the shape now uncovered revealing a young female. He then lies the body on a pedestal.

A mask then explains that this place has memories about one who could bring the soul of the dead back, but the trespassing is strictly forbidden (Figure 4.1). Back to Wander, our hero, he is told by the voice of the supernatural Dormin that he can revive his dead lover but that the law of the mortals prohibits such transgression. Wander, however, can do it if he destroys the idols on the room by killing the Colossi, incarnations scattered across the land. Then Dormin warns Wander that the prize to pay might be heavy.

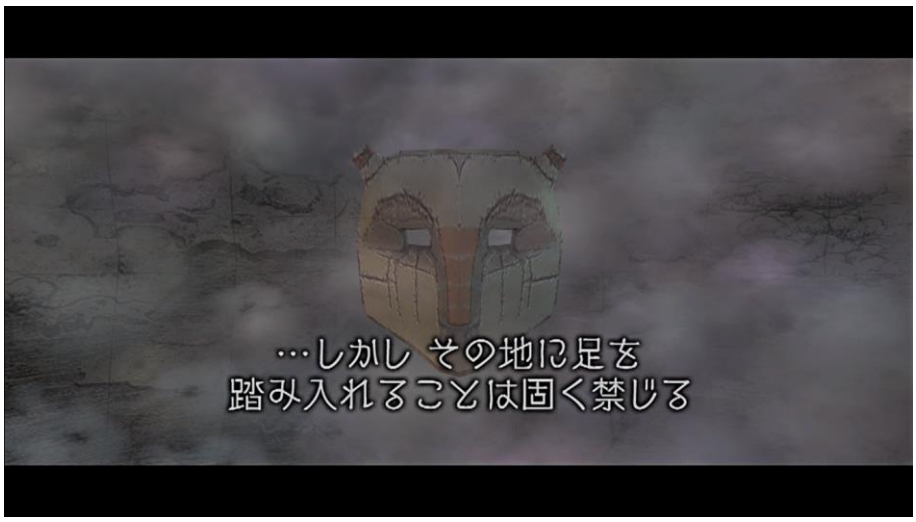

Figure 4. 1. A masked narrator tells about the prohibition on entering the Ancient Lands

Wander's quest starts by locating the first colossus using the light from his sword that guides him to his enemy as well as showing the week spots on the immense adversary. Once the colossus is killed black fluid chords exit the body and enter Wander's while an idol implodes in the room. Waking up in the room again Dormin tells Wander through riddles about how to defeat the next Colossus. The process is repeated sixteen times but in the middle of Wander's quest various riders, a priest and some soldiers, enter the forbidden lands to stop him.

Right after defeating the last colossus, the soldiers enter the room with Lord Emon, a priest wearing the mask from the introduction. The last idol implodes as Wander's body is transported from the battle-scene to the room. Wander, now corrupted with horns and uncanny marks is told he has only been used and is now possessed by the devil. Wander is transformed into a shadow and then turned into a colossus himself. Dormin is

then resurrected now he has reunited his separated body parts and borrowed Wander's. He then fights Emon and his soldiers as they try to seal the demon. Emon manages to create a portal of white light that sucks Dormin in, reducing Wander to his original form. The bridge collapses sealing the land where the young lady wakes up. She then finds a crying horned baby in the pool that Wander was sucked into. The baby is taken to a hidden garden at the top of the castle where wild peaceful animals greet them.

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The study of *Shadow's* engagement with the EBT is marked by two main aspects inherent to its mediality: its ludic experience and its simultaneous narrative. Therefore, to analyse *Shadow's* contribution to the EBT conversation I first focus on the experience it aims to construct and the meanings it aims to communicate through playing the game. To do that, as mentioned in the previous section I refer to a study of its content, its organisation through its patterned progression and the construction of affective attention through the game mechanics. For clarity and feasibility, this account of *Shadow* studies the game focusing on the separated patterns it presents: exploration and confrontation, and their relation and repetition. Once this structure is analysed, I discuss the game as a whole, its

mechanics, narration and combination. The first approach is mainly ludological, focusing on the game mechanics and their effect on the gameplay, while the second explores the making of a narrative, a story, through the computer game medium (Pérez Latorre, 2012. This relates to the way the story is communicated to the player. In other words, it is by playing that the player consumes and receives information about the quest, the world and the story of *Shadow*.

The Structural Pattern of Shadow

As previously stated, *Shadow* presents a two-stagedd, well-differentiated pattern. Each encounter is therefore composed by two separated but connected phases: the first one of exploration of the Ancient Lands in which we look for the hidden colossi and the second a confrontation, a contest of violence and strength in which defeat signifies death. Although both, as said, are connected let's focus first on the ludic and mechanic characteristics of the exploration in *Shadow*.

Exploring the Land of Obsession

Exploration in *Shadow* is a vital element to complete Wander's quest and preludes every encounter with the Colossi. Finding of the enemy is part of the puzzle, requiring not only the ability to understand the mechanic of the sword's guidance to the objective, but also the possibilities and restrictions of Wander's interactions with the landscape. Through these trips the player is sometimes forced to leave Wander's horse Agro and use his

abilities to climb, jump, run or overcome possible obstacles in general. In doing so the player is aided by the information of the Head-up Display (HUD), textual information that constitutes the player's interface (Figure 4.2). Through these visual elements the player is told about the amount of strength or stamina available, the selected weapon and health bar. This is the only information *Shadow* communicates to the player, apart from the Colossus' health once in combat.

Figure 4. 2. On the corners of the screen minimal information is displayed

This minimalist approach, what Ueda called subtractive design, had the intention to maintain a mimetic relation between the game and its representation of reality (Sony, 2006). Considering that kind of visual display of information is missing in our everyday life, Ueda decided to keep it to a minimum, to focus the player on the straightforwardness of his quest and its simple mechanics. The exploration, therefore, is both a prelude, an anticipation, as well as an integral piece of the puzzle each of

these sixteen mortal trials present for the transgressor. But to better understand how these exploration phases function I present a case study of the finding of the fifteenth colossi.

With the Ancient Lands having been emptied by our almost completed quest, Dormin offers us the hint that our next foe dwells in the ruins of a destroyed city. Once again, we mount Agro, we lift our sword and follow the straight light it reflects. We leave behind empty plains, stony wastes, and grassy hills (Figure 4.3). Then, after crossing two natural, twisted bridges we reach a calm hidden forest. There is, however, no way to follow that path as there is an unpassable breach. We must turn back and go around the mountain range. To the left we find a desert where we have already defeated a colossus but, this time the light leads us to a stony gate (Figure 4.4). There Agro cannot continue as we enter a dark tunnel. Different blocks from the collapsed architecture allow us to reach a wide opening. In front of us lie the ruins of immensely high columns, passing them we access a wide plain flanked by some unreachable steps. Three tall arcs lead us to the end of the paved plateau and an abrupt cliff. We push forward looking for our enemy who suddenly climbs the cliff in front of us, first his enormous paws, then his monstrous head and finally the rest of his huge body. The battle starts.

Figure 4. 3. As we progress in the game we revisit old battlefields as spatial mementos

Figure 4. 4. Raise your sword to find your next foe

As the example shows, the feeling of loneliness is emphasized by the emptiness of the deserted Ancient Lands. There is nothing else to do there except for riding and finding the next colossus. Consequently, *Shadow* lacks any secondary missions, side quests or the presence of NPC's (Non-Playable Characters). As Ueda affirmed in an interview, this decision was aimed at solving the the limitation NPCs have in computer games and how this breaks the feeling of reality or naturality (Sony, 2006). Ueda was

mainly concerned with the player running into an NPC who would behave identically every time Wander interacts with it. Aware of these limitations, Ueda acknowledged these NPCs will repeat the same dialogue to the player, hindering the mimetic representation of the real world, breaking the illusion of the fictional world as natural or realistic.

But this has an effect that connects mechanics and narrative. Indeed, as the Ancient Lands are deserted of any other living creatures to interact with, the feeling of isolation is emphasised. This design decision also increases the hurry of Wander to kill the Colossi to revive his lover, a feeling aided by revisiting and restarting in front of Mono's body in the shrine, a constant reminder of the quest. The feeling of repetition is therefore maintained and stressed throughout the whole gameplay. The space, the world of *Shadow,* echoes the reiterative quest connecting both liminal time and space. The spatial centre is constantly revisited while the time starts again in a cyclical structure only broken by dim physical signs of progression: the implosion of an idol in the shrine and the almost imperceptible increase in stamina of Wander represented in the HUD.

But another consequence of the emptiness of the land is the deprivation of choices and a cyclical chronotopic experience, reinforced by Mono. Every time we succeed we are transported back in front of Mono as Dormin tells us about our next foe and

how to defeat it (Figure 5.5). Thus, as Óliver Pérez-Latorre (2012) argues, the space (and I will add time) of *Shadow* is of obsession beyond solitude (286). In a land of wide expanses, in a game that allows us to travel wherever we want from the start and to disengage from combat anytime, the avatar, and through him the player, only seeks one thing: the next colossus.

The only thing to do during these extended rides is to look for the next foe and think. This reflective attitude is enabled by the emptiness of the land and the lack of any distraction. These explorations precede and follow each encounter with the colossi, and that occupies our attention as we focus on where our next lies and how to find it. We have just murdered one of these impressive and uncanny beings and we are immediately on our way to kill another without any questioning from Wander, or the game. This is the only time that the player can attend to her/his doubts and internal struggles; this is when we are allowed to respond reflectively to the story. As David Ciccaricco (2007) argues, “the player not only inherits the task of [Wander] but also (potentially and ideally) the psychological baggage that his ordeal entails”. This does not imply that both player and Wander are in psychological harmony as we cannot know if Wander is himself questioning his quest and actions.

However, *Shadow* makes increases the player’s uncertainty about the morality of his acts and the disruption and destruction

of an alienating world that constantly rejects you. The intense moral interrogation contrasts with the decided Wander and the straightforward representation of the EBT in *Shadow* (Suttner, 2015). Only by killing can you progress, and every time you are haunted by the guilt of murder you are placed in front of your lover. There is no room for questioning your quest. There is only haste.

Figure 4. 5. Wander wakes up in front of his lover and his only obsession

Here, however, arises a dichotomy, a tension between player and avatar caused by the game mechanics, its opportunities and restrictions. We know Wander wants to destroy the colossi to succeed in his EBT, but the player may choose to stop this transgression, to reconcile with nature and its flow. Nevertheless, he will then be trapped in a land of isolation and obsession. In fact, if the player decides to cross the bridge and leave the Ancient Lands, a gale will fix him in the spot not allowing him to advance. Therefore, regardless of the player's decision to

perform the EBT or not there are no options left to advance in the game. Once in the Ancient Lands, all you need to care about is how to kill the colossi.

Disruption and Violence

The second main phase in *Shadow* are the battles between Wander and the colossi. These are the central climactic encounters necessary to the success of the quest and, if something stands out from them it is their fierce violence. Every time the player succeeds in the exploration phase and finds the colossus a cut-scene emphasises its enormity, its skills and powers and thus, the challenges the player must face to bring it down. This presentation stresses both the majestic visuality of the colossi and emphasises Wander's bold and reckless mission. Compared to Wander even the smallest of the creatures is a goliath full of strength and power; and yet, there is no other choice but to defeat and kill it (Figure 4.6). However, during these first moments of each encounter most of the colossi behave reactively, that is, it is the player who must engage and provoke the fight. Even within each battle, it is possible to withdraw, to retire or even to completely abandon the combat while the colossus remains in its lair.

Figure 4. 6. Wander stands minuscule in front of his foes

This first characteristic has two implications for the mechanics and the story-world. On the ludic aspect the confinement of the reactive colossus forces the player to explore and initially familiarise himself with the space of the battle, which is key for success. It also allows Wander to recover his stamina and health as the time passes, if he manages to disengage long enough (Pérez-Latorre, 2012: 289). For the narrative world it places the responsibility for these aggressions on Wander and the player alone (Fortugno, 2010). Therefore, the EBT forces the hero to disrupt, attack and destroy worlds and beings that would, otherwise, coexists peacefully in these lands. But as important, it lays the responsibility and the guilt unilaterally on Wander, and the player.

From this first characteristic it can be concluded that it must be the player who straightforwardly engages and attacks the colossus. The only way to succeed at his quest is to approach them, to get as close as possible and even to climb on them.

These are, in fact, the only victory conditions: to find the colossi's weak spots and how to reach them to stab the enemy repeatedly until it is killed. The victory conditions for each encounter and the EBT quest are but one: to slay the colossi with the magical sword. From this rule the player is forced to find and reach each illuminated point on the body of these immense monsters (Figure 4.7). The hero must then get into close contact, climb up and down and confront the face of the colossus as he draws its life out.

Figure 4. 7. The blue marks show the weak spots of the colossi

This main and only mandatory victory condition leads Wander to use all his physical and mental acuity as he figures out the puzzle each colossus presents. *Shadow* then depicts the EBT from these battles as an intensely violent and aggressive quests. The transgression is thus a bloody and violent endeavour in which death is punctually defeated through the murder and destruction of the whole world. But this main mechanic also forces the player to confront and attach himself/herself physically to the being s/he

is murdering. Wander cannot distance himself from the passive and reactive beings he is killing, he must get onto them, explore and keep them close. But this physical proximity cannot reach a metaphysical connection. You grab them, you become part of the immense creature you are killing while they try to resist you, to survive and defeat death, which is what you have become. But this characteristic of the game, which both affects the gameplay and its meaning-making, can be better understood through an example from the game. For reasons of continuity, I will use the encounter with the colossus from the previous section.

Once our foe shows itself completely we run from it. His steps shake the ground and us with it. We fall to the floor damaged and, if caught under them, we die. Escape is the only way for now. We run around the empty arena trying, unsuccessfully to reach the steps in the side to access the arcs over the colossus' body. However, the sides of the passages are too high for us. We repeatedly fail as our enemy keeps attacking us with his paws. Dormin's voice confirms to us what we already know, we need to access higher ground. Then, we notice that when the colossus stamps the side pavement to hit us the tiles rise allowing us to access the side passages.

The colossus then tries to hit us, the whole building shakes but we are protected, for now, by the columns. We finally reach the arck and we are ready to jump to its body when the colossus hits

the bridge, and we fall, and the process starts again. Now, however, we manage to jump from the broken bridge and reach its head. There, the blue mark shows us its weak spot and we stab it repeatedly. Eventually the sign disappears, and we are left harmless, powerless. From the ground we direct our sword to his body seeking the new weak place. Now we find it in his right hand. Then we access its hand as he tries to smack us with it and, after repeated stabs it collapses. Black tendrils leave its body and violently enter ours leaving us unconscious.

From this encounter there is a main characteristic of the representation of the player-avatar in the world of *Shadow*: the enormous inbalance between him and his foes not only in size and power but also in resources. Thus, while the colossi have different abilities such as underwater breathing, flying, immense strength or inhuman speed, Wander is endowed with his horse, a bow, a sword and his limited stamina. Visually the difference between avatar and foes is evident, but even more so mechanically as the ground shakes with the colossi's steps, the wind changes or the scenery collapses. To face that the player counts on the austerity of the information that is given to him through Dormin's riddles and his own wits. It is through the player's cunning that he can solve the puzzles these enemies are. By observation, study and comprehension of the monster's movements and its relation to the space, behaviour and patterns

the player may find the weak spots of his foe and, more importantly, how to reach them. But again, this study must be pragmatic, away from any interest in their nature, from any compassion or empathy.

However, as mentioned, the only essential victory condition is to sink the sword in the colossi's weak spots. Reaching them, and how you perform that is contingent, but the effect increases the heroism and epicity of the combat. This heroism is nuanced and shaded by the brutality and violence with which the killing of the colossi is performed. While the player stabs the monster, it tries to throw him off by shaking its head or body, which stresses the condition of the colossi as sentient, suffering beings (Figure 4.8). There the player acknowledges by himself the only clear characteristic of these monsters: that they suffer.

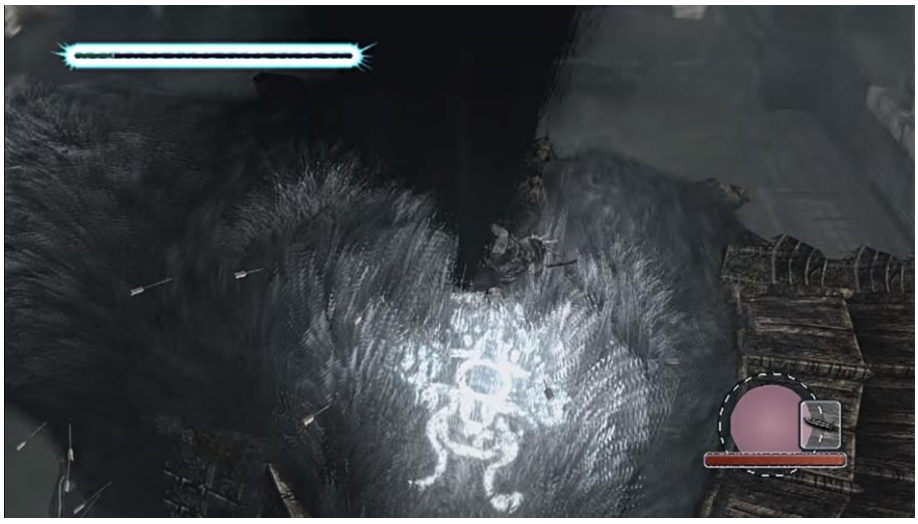

Figure 4. 8. Streams of dark blood flow from the head after every strike

Then, once we overcome the different obstacles of each battle we are faced with the collapsing of our foe, and as it lies dead

black tendrils coming from his corpse reach us leaving us unconscious (Figure 4.9). But this moment of victory is key to understanding how the quest is designed by Ueda. Contrary to epic adventure games there is no celebration of the killing of our enemy. First, the music turns to a sad melody Ueda placed deliberately to stress the feeling of wrongness and defilement while it mourns the dead creature (Stuttner, 2015: 83). As Nick Stuttner puts it "[t]his is no celebratory music […] no winning message" (ibid: 35). There are no rewards for our victory, no new powers, tools or levelling up that emphasises the ambiguity and defilement of our acts. The player is then deprived of agency and given it back just to be chased by the dark tendrils that leave the colossus' body and enter his body no matter how much s/he tries to escape from them. It is, then, by manipulating the conventional rules and mechanics of games that Ueda forces the player to interpret his actions (Sicart, 2009: 216).

4. 9. Black tendrils leave the colossus corpse chasing Wander

But this time between victory and next quest is a moment of reflection, of bewilderment and insecurity about the meaning and repercussions of what we have done and what we are about to repeat. Moreover, after each killing, after each successful battle, the concern about the reality and feasibility of our success draws near and with it the disturbance of the completion of the EBT. If in the beginning our quest seemed desperate but heroic, its performance and its near conclusion make us face the once distant possibility of the dimensions and forms of the resurrection of Dormin, a force of violence and mystery.

Eventually, the last battle we fight transforms us into a colossus as Dormin possesses our body (Figure 4.10). We, however, still control our own actions despite being finally defeated. As important as that, if Dormin was truly a god of destruction, it never lied to us. After we are sucked up to the pool of light by Lord Emon, Mono is resurrected. Dormin, therefore, has proven to be a faithful entity, one who not only keeps his promises but who also warns us about the consequences of our actions. Consequently, *Shadow* is a game that characterises the EBT as violence, the obsession to alter death as its magnification and the fixation with the individual as a danger to the community. Nevertheless, to better understand how these tensions are represented in *Shadow* I now study their narrativization through

the videoludic medium and the subsequent EBT engagement it constructs.

4. 10. We fight an unwanted desperate battle transformed into a colossus

Playing the EBT in Shadow

As the previous section argued, there is a main moral tension underlaying *Shadow'*s gameplay experience. Priming Wander's individual impulses and needs is not, a priori, a choice that overrides the survival of the cosmos and every being in it. This, according to moral philosophy would not qualify as a moral dilemma (McConnell, 2018). A moral dilemma is a situation in which the agent is required to do each of two (or more) actions but where s/he cannot do both. The agent is therefore condemned to moral failure as none of the options overrides the other. This is not the case of *Shadow*, or the EBT. Wander's conundrum is therefore a moral conflict, as one of the options, abandoning the EBT, clearly overrides the transgression. This

difference, apparently a merely conceptual issue, is key to comprehending the ethical representation of the EBT.

In *Shadow*, the transgression is not only deontologically immoral (it breaks the laws of mortals) but also consequentially immoral (it will bring the destruction of the world). Wander's, and the player's, disjunctive is not between similar options but between the evident ethical thing to do and a selfish act. If there is any struggle in *Shadow* it is the attempt to justify the EBT, to elevate it to the same level as the obedience of the law that prohibits it.

However, through the repetition of the same pattern and its emotional impact on the player, *Shadow* elevates this conflict to a moral dilemma: is the resurrection of Mono a reparation of a previous injustice? Or should I accept her fate and give in to the workings of the universe and consequently ensure its safety? It is my argument that *Shadow'*s approach and moral proposal follows the second option. From the characterisation of Wander, the violence of his actions and his reckless disregard of anyone else but himself, *Shadow* alienates the player from his avatar reinforcing the defilement of the EBT. This separation is constructed through two main elements: the mechanics of the game and the ethical and moral issues it raises. The following sections address these questions, all of them participating in the EBT, an abstraction of a contextual worry regarding tensions between individualism and communalism.

The Mechanics of the EBT

This section focuses on how *Shadow* is designed to emotionally impact the player based on two main mechanical features: the concept of subtracting ethics and the concept of futile interactivity. In linking both it draws on theories of the phenomenology of the avatar-player relationship, that is, the complex set of connections between the game world and the world outside of it with the player at their centre.

Subtracting design aims to maximise the sense of simplicity by removing any superfluous or unnecessary elements from the game. In *Shadow* it presents a feeling of mimesis with the world outside the game (Pérez Latorre, 2012: 272). This design decision has a purpose: to enhance the player's engagement and immersion in the game-world and its narrative. Different mechanics and visual styles aim for a sense of naturalism that constructs a game that fully engages and captivates the player. In that direction the game is punctuated with minor details such as Agro's punctual disobedience or Wander's clumsiness to enhance the illusion of realism while it complicates victory or isolates the player.

Regarding subtractive ethics, this concept refers to the process by which a game forces ethical choices upon the player through its narrative and mechanics (Sicart, 2009). These ethical decisions lie at the core philosophy of the gameplay creating a moral experience to which the player can react and reflect, but

not alter. At the same time, subtractive ethics leave the ethical reasoning to the player, respecting his presence as moral agents in the game's ethical system. It does not force any morality upon the player but transmits its ethical stance through the player's hermeneutics of his own actions, the rules of the game and its mechanics (ibid: 215). It is in that tension of forced ethical experience that the player is deprived of the agency to choose, while s/he is allowed to reflect, meditate and be aware of the morals the game explores. The player is forced into an uncomfortable ethical position (ibid: 216). In that tension we are witness and agents who are constrained to be unethical but with enough control to be the ones performing the immoral acts.

The main tension lies there, between the values of the avatar-player and the subject outside the game, or between the game-world and its relation to the outside world. *Shadow* is thus aware of the moral capacities of the player and fosters them while constraining the player's agency through its mechanics. It is a game that makes the exploration of ethical boundaries within the medium its core philosophical stance (Sicart, 2009: 217). To construct that ethical experience, that ambiguous and tense relation between game-world, avatar, player and agent outside the game Ueda refers to the illusion of agency and control over the game using the trope of "futile interactivity" (Fortugno, 2009).

Futile interactivity is a term developed by Nicholas Fortugno while discussing the power computer games give the audience over important parts of the narrative. This control over the story may eliminate the tension between the reader's desire and the outcome, what he labels "dramatic necessity", which deprives the story of its emotional power (Eco, 1996). However, computer games have the capacity to subvert and alter that expectation using futile interactivity. The concept refers to scenes in which the player is given agency with a task that seems accomplishable despite being designed to be mechanically impossible (Fortugno, 2009: 176). In the case of *Shadow* "the game uses multiple moments of futile interaction to give the tragedy its emotional power" (ibid: 185). Fortugno's first example is the moment a colossus is defeated, and the player is given agency back; then, trying to escape from the black tendrils he is, inevitably caught and penetrated by them. The reason behind this design has to do with the way the player would experience the moment. Using futile interactivity designers can create dramatic necessity as they play with the player to believe there is something to do there, a way to dodge the tendrils as this allows the player to take control back. But *Shadow* uses the player's agency and its manipulation to increase the sense of entrapment by his quest.

Futile interaction is a central mechanic in *Shadow's* meditation on the medium and the EBT conversation. It also relates directly

to Wander's quest and the player involvement and experiencing of the EBT. From the beginning of the quest, the player's agency is futile, there is no power over the EBT. The capacity to choose and decide on the transgression is an illusion, a deception constructed through the possibilities and limitations of the medium. Furthermore, we are not forced to commit the EBT, we can choose to leave the game, or simply not to progress. But the attraction of the possibility to do something impossible outside the game world and yet forbidden is too captivating. This tension, our futile attempts to escape the temptation of the transgression, the obsession of our avatar and our irreversible fate structures the story and the gameplay.

Finally, *Shadow* presents yet another ludic and narrative tension, the dichotomy between avatar and player, and between player and agent outside the game world. To better understand the player's phenomenological experience, I return to the concept of avatar and its relation to both player and agent outside the game world. The concept of the avatar is central to understanding the link between game and player. The avatar is a vehicle through which the player is given agency and an embodied presence within the game-world (Klevjer, 2012: 17). Our relation to the avatar channels our perception as a body extension we incorporate into our own.

This relation, however, is not tangible but symbolic. We give instructions to the avatar through the controller and the anthropomorphic representation responds to that communication. It is an extension but at the same time makes us subject to the game-world's logics, laws and rules. Through the avatar we experience the materiality of the fictional world, which operates through our familiarity of the corporeality the games offer (their sense of gravity, natural forces, lightning and so on). We perceive the world and the story through its point of view. But this generates great paradoxes. The avatar is not only an extension as it directs our body and perception in a limited way. We can resist it, we can disagree with his aim as much as, in *Shadow*, he can struggle and fight back. Also, the epistemological and informational level can be uneven as well as our feelings towards the story or the quest. All these features break and challenge the player's expectations of computer games, of the role of the avatar and his power and control over them. And that is what Ueda exploits in *Shadow*, not only the paradoxes of the EBT but also our contradictory experience and understanding of agency in computer games.

Therefore, in the case of *Shadow* this vehicular relation is modified through a false impression of the empowerment of the player with an avatar and a world that seem extremely interactive, but which reveal their constraints as soon as we resist

the EBT. This is a land of transgression, of crime and rebellion. Futile interactivity encapsulates this tension in *Shadow* between the high level of interactivity within the game-world and the futility of our actions if we try to oppose our avatar's obsessions. *Shadow* complies with our desires as long as they remain in symphony with the EBT, with our avatar's. In the power struggle for control over story and game the avatar prevails as it is his world. *Shadow* is a game about how doing evil acts feels. The game compels the player to keep playing to experience the meditation on the quest's immorality. There are no choices because Shadow is not about deciding on the EBT but about fully exploring how transgressing feels. It is an ethical experience, a moral challenge to the player and the agent outside the game.

Shadow of the Colossus as Ethical Experience

In 2009 Sicart defined *Shadow* as a successful closed ethical game design. By that, he argues that playing *Shadow* "involves making moral choices or suffering ethical dilemmas, yet the game system does not evaluate the players' actions, thus respecting and encouraging players' ethical agency" (2009: 215). *Shadow* leads the player to experience an ethical game, one that disempowers him from exerting his own morality. In *Shadow*, this ethical meditation is deeply intertwined and related to the EBT as a moral exploration. The aim of this section is, building on the Sicart's argument, to discuss the moral conflict *Shadow* proposes within the frame of the EBT. To do so the section

explores the decisive moments that move the narrative and the ethical experience of the game forward within the philosophy of ethics and morality.

The ethical input in *Shadow* starts in the introduction to the game during Lord Emon's narration. There, as he tells of the possibility to resurrect the dead, he stresses that entering the Ancient Lands is strictly forbidden. We know then, from the very first moment that what we are doing is punishable and banned from the game-world's ethical worldview. The second warning comes from Dormin, which reinforces the idea that resurrecting the dead goes against the laws of the mortals. But these are only words, challenges common to adventure narratives. Doing the impossible, acting even against nature and its merciless rules for love, for a girl sacrificed for uncertain reasons, seems even just and fair.

Up until now the game hints at the tragic nature of its narration through aesthetic means, the grim darkness of the land, the inhospitable weather and isolation that reigns over the landscape. The first ethical challenge appears after we encounter our first enemy. There is no engagement, the creature peacefully guards its lair with birds flying over his head. To trigger the battle, it is us who must face the colossus and attack it. Finally, we reach its head and stab it repeatedly as it tries to break free and return to its solitary peace. As in every encounter

there is a moment of final decision and realisation. As you calculate the health bar of your enemy displayed on the screen, the game makes you aware of which would be the last stab. From the first encounter onward this is a crucial moment where you must choose, you have the colossus at your mercy, you have the control and the power to execute or spare it. But to complete the game there is no other way but to kill. Power is responsibility, making ethical choices and being accountable for them; and playing *Shadow* means experiencing what the EBT represents: violence, transgression, death and destruction.

This example represents the recurrence of *Shadow's* main moral conflict. This ethical meditation is even more challenging as the player is given the power to succeed in the transgression. From this possibility comes the moral responsibility of the player. As Suzanne Uniacke argues "[w]e are responsible for the intended consequences of our actions" (2010: 596). It is in these debates about responsibility, free will and power that *Shadow* builds its ethical interrogations.

Responsibility in *Shadow* derives from the condition of the player as moral agent. To be responsible is to be answerable for the consequences of one's actions. That is, to have a moral case to answer for having brought something about (Zimmerman, 2001). Since the player has the capacity to choose and the power to perform the EBT s/he is then accountable as both a prospective

and retrospective responsible agent (Duff, 1998; Zimmerman, 2001). Prospective responsibility refers to those moral obligations of a person *qua* human being. In *Shadow's* case, Wander and the player are responsible for their actions as their must obey the moral rules established by their community and their mortal condition. Breaking those rules immediately makes them responsible for their inhuman actions. Furthermore, the transgression makes the player retrospectively responsible, that is, responsible for what his personal agency is doing and bringing about (Duff, 1998). In this sense, the laws the player is breaking are morally significant for the game-world: not to break the boundary between life and death, not to kill the colossi. The game communicates this responsibility through narrative progression but also through aesthetics and mechanics of the game. Good examples of that can be seen at the aftermath of the battles.

As many have argued the defeat of the first colossus is the first violation of the player's expectations through its mechanics and aesthetics (Fortugno, 2011; Cole, 2015; Suttner, 2015). This first destruction increases the doubts and the inner interrogations about a quest that seemed heroic, but also deeply conflictive.

The player is forced to watch as his enemy dies and is mourned by the game, by the world accusing the player of polluting and destroying it, of being an immoral and unwanted being. These same emotions would be repeated every time Wander executes

his rivals. Then, right after the cut-scene the player is given control back to be chased by the black tendrils emerging from his enemy's body. This futile interactive mechanic is a synecdochal example of the whole experience from *Shadow*, the dichotomy of agency, control and restraint by the game, the recurrent use of futile interactivity.

This mechanic feature is imbedded within *Shadow*'s moral approach of the EBT. You have the control and the agency to commit the transgressions. However, as a human you are morally responsible for your deeds and their consequences. *Shadow* allows the possibility to transgress but it imposes the punishment immediately. It is not through a cut-scene, however. The chasing of the tendrils is performed with the player in control of Wander allowing him time to escape, to try to run away. But the aim of this scene is to increase the impact of having to face the inevitable outcome of his evil acts. In other words, *Shadow* wants the player to experience and feel the moral punishment from his transgression. Every time s/he breaks the moral rules of the worlds he knows not only that s/he would be blamed but that the punishment is inevitable.

That leads to the last moral turning point in the game. With the arrival of Lord Emon the player is told about Wander's past and that he was aware of the sacred law he is breaking, stole from his people and decided to risk the whole world for his quest

(Fortugno, 2009: 182). This is just the confirmation of our corrupted wishes. But *Shadow* goes beyond stressing that feeling through new information and it implements the moral ambiguity of our quest. This is emphasised by the metamorphosis of Wander into a colossus. Then, possessed by Dormin, our movements are extremely slow, inaccurate and hard to execute. Our new powers are in fact another exercise doomed to defeat. But now, transformed into a colossus we complete our sympathy for the beasts we had slayed. The intention of the design is not to feel powerful but to experience what our opponents felt, to have a final interactive experience of injustice, futility and pain. This is the final push of sympathy to the giants the player spent the game murdering (ibid: 183).

Nevertheless, the whole moral experience of *Shadow* cannot be fully understood without recourse to the previous game by Ico Studio: *Ico*. The relation between the two games is incomplete and unsure, but we know that *Shadow* is meant to take place hundreds of years before the actions of *Ico*. As well, many clues and elements connect both stories. The most evident one is the horned baby in *Shadow's* end that links to *Ico's* story, in which horned children, reincarnations of the polluted Wander, are sacrificed and sealed away before they reach adulthood (Figure 4.11).

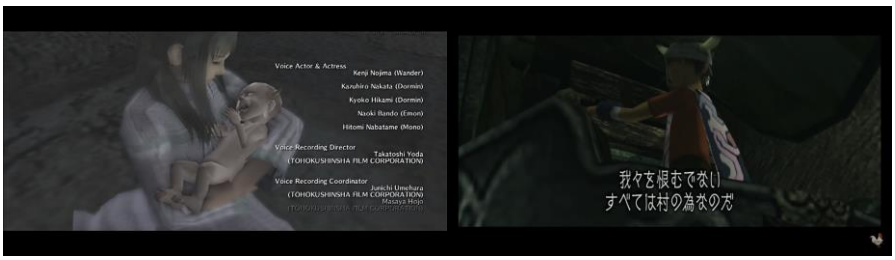

Figure 4. 11. Wander, now a horned baby pollutes the world originating the story of Ico

It is the quest for Ico, Wander reincarnated, to kill her, to free all of them from the state in which he has submersed the world. Memories and remembrance of the killing and defeat of the mad queen in *Ico* alters the success of reviving Mono, our foe and sole enemy in Ueda's first game. This increases the EBT as a defiled quest for we know the consequences of our action and the eventual decline of Mono into insanity, a fate created by our own obstinacy. If the work of Ueda is extensively ambiguous and paradoxical, the connection between *Ico* and *Shadow* increases it: reviving Mono means turning her into our foe but having killed her signifies the murder of our lover, for whom we have sacrificed everything.

Consequently, the EBT is positioned as the origin of every disaster, one whose effect lingers for hundreds of years affecting generations of innocents. Success in blending life and death signifies failure and destruction. And the player has participated in both, captivated by and engaged with a game that managed to successfully draw him/her into committing the most essential transgression. But *Shadow* is a questioning of life too, of our

power and responsibilities as living beings. The question is then what you do with that power being alive gives us.

Life in *Shadow* thus plays a role as important as death. Wander is obsessed with the reincarnation of Mono, the player with keeping the avatar alive and the colossi with surviving the unexpected confrontation. Death seems to be partially defeated. Dormin is banished, Wander reincarnates as a horned baby, Agro reappears alive and Mono is resurrected. Life triumphs in the end, a nuanced happy ending almost unexpected considering the grim and dark progression of the story. But then again, we know this is not the end, but the beginning of something else. The pollution of death will rule for generations until we mend what we have started, until we accept that letting go means a confrontation with the past, a violent and aggressive affair that make us conflict with our own feelings, passions and weaknesses. *Shadow* thus constructs a deeply and intensely conflictive, ambiguous and paradoxical engagement with the EBT. It allows us to commit the transgression, it attracts us through is engaging mechanics, modulation of affect and the challenges it bestows upon the player. But as much as it tempts and permits it also punishes a crime that surpasses your own self and pollutes the whole world (Figure 4.12).

4. 12. Mono, obsessed with immortality is killed by Ico, Wander's reincarnation

The experience that *Shadow* offers is one of transgression, crime and rebellion. But is also an exploration of guilt, blame and moral responsibility. Futile interactivity mechanically encapsulates these tensions in *Shadow* between the high level of interactivity with the game world and the futility of our actions if we try to oppose our avatar's obsessions. *Shadow* complies with our intentions as long as they remain in symphony with the EBT, with our avatar's. In the power struggle for control over story and game the avatar prevails as it is his world. The only way to resist the EBT gets us expelled from the game, we are there only to transgress and help the avatar with his crime, nothing more. This is Ueda's main approach to the EBT and computer games, a medium not only to tell stories but to create and explore experiences, to wander through our human condition and to test the limits of our own existence. The EBT is part of the debate on the understanding of evil beings and action. How does doing evil

make you feel and what it means to do evil is a central feature of the significance and form of the EBT in the game.

Moral evil typically evokes cognitive and emotional responses in the victims such as anger or resentment. However, extreme circumstances can generate extreme behaviour in those who in normal life would not think of being cruel to others (Scarre, 2012: 588). As Morton argues “far more evil acts are performed by perfectly normal people out of confusion or desperation or obsession than by violent individuals or sociopaths” (2004: 53-4). But what is to be evil? To Hume the idea of the evil character is malice, wishing ill to others. Hillel Steiner defines evil acts as “wrong acts that are pleasurable for their doers” (Steiner, 2002: 189). Similarly, Colin McGinn proposes that the evil person is one of a character whose pleasure derives from others’ pain (1997: 62).

To others, such as Arendt, the evil agent is someone who cannot hear the moral considerations against certain acts or consider them as reasons (1994). Evil agents are afflicted by a moral blindness, the suffering of her/his victims silenced. As Garrard argues, thinking about his victims “don’t weight with him at all, not even to be outweighed” (Garrard,1998: 53-4). Daniel Haybron further argues that the evil person is “thoroughly and consistently” vicious and has no redeeming virtues. To be evil is to not be moved or motivated “by the good to a morally significant

extent" (Haybron, 2002: 70). Such an individual would consistently show his most unpleasant side. To sum up, both main approaches either consider the evil subject as a moral imbecile or as a truly evil character moved by his sadistic nature. The debate is, however, not definitive, but still relevant for matters of ethics, morality and justice. How then does *Shadow* join the debate on the evil and how is that related to the EBT?

Performing the EBT in *Shadow* is sanctioned as an immoral selfish act. The killing, the risking of the world and the non-acceptance of the rules established by the community are represented from the beginning as unethical choices. But is Wander an evil character? And if so, how does it feel for the player to be and do evil? In *Shadow,* Wander is not treated by others, not even those whom he threatens, as an evil being. When Lord Emon finds out about what he has performed he expresses only mercy and pity. Even after Wander, transformed into a demon, tries to kill him, Lord Emon wishes for Wander's redemption. This external judgment is also repeatedly manifested throughout the game. Wander is not killing the colossi because he enjoys it, he is not jeopardising the whole world because he despises its existence.

Wander is the example of the moral imbecile, of a mind so troubled that he cannot think of anything else but the resurrection of Mono (Scarre, 2010). As the mechanics and the structure of

the game reinforce that there is no distraction, no time to stop and think. Wander is aware that some fatal consequences will befall after he breaches the boundaries of life and death, but he does not care. However, that he is not portrayed as an evil being does not mean his actions are not evil. Wander is a deeply selfish and obsessed individual who disregards others for his own satisfaction. His individualism leads him towards his egoistic quest.

However, if we are defined by our actions, Wander is not alone in this evil quest. The player is always present from the moment the transgression starts. Since then *Shadow* uses recurrent indications of the immorality of the quest. In the prologue we are told that the trespassing to the Ancient Lands is forbidden. Then Dormin warns the player about the dangerous consequences of the quest. Mechanically and narratively he stresses the defilement of the quest. Thus, from the beginning *Shadow* ensures the player doubts about the morality of his actions while it does not discourage him from finishing the game.

To do that *Shadow* uses a mixture of features that compel the player to finish the game, while at the same time challenging his ethical values. Some key factors relate to the cognitive distribution of information and the sense of mystery (Cole, 2015). It is through ambiguity and lack of information that the player is

encouraged to keep playing to solve the mystery of the quest, its origins, development and consequences.

There is much in the game that is left untold and only the progression of the story, the exploration of the world and the outcome of the quest fill those gaps in. Curiosity is a main part of the attraction and the emotional impact of *Shadow* (Cole, 2015: 10). It is through this original engagement that *Shadow* builds other strategies to influence the player's experience. Advancing on the quest constructs an intense attachment to Wander, Agro, Mono, the story and gameworld. But this alone cannot explain why and how the player keeps playing a repetitive game that, on the surface, does not reward success in any evident way.

Apart from the narrative features, the game captivates the attention of the player and the eagerness to complete the story, the game and the quest. Through its mechanics *Shadow* constructs challenging and innovative puzzles incorporated into the boss-battles, which are exigent but not impossible. This compels the player to test her/his abilities as the battles with the colossi prove to be an attractive gameplay design, a combination of an entertaining challenge that makes the EBT fun to be played.

But a final consideration comes from the attraction of an evil quest. *Shadow*'s moral experience attracts our curiosity to explore other emotions, especially ethically questionable ones. Through the EBT the player explores its most individualistic

nature, justifying his rebellion against the chains of nature, against the rules of the community and the cosmos. *Shadow* and the EBT are expressions of humanity's interrogations of how it feels to overcome the impossible, to triumph against the laws of the universe. *Shadow* allows us to do it, but it also punishes both avatar and player. Through its closed ethical design *Shadow* reinforces the rules and laws Wander's egoistic impulses break, a conflict representing the tensions of the individual against the group.

Shadow's EBT is an abstraction dealing with more concrete and contextually situated concerns. While it discusses afterlife, life and death, its main concern, its underlying structure, deals with a tension more specific to its historical, social and cultural context: individualism versus sociocentrism (Shimizu, 2010). The EBT is, in *Shadow* as well as in *Alchemist* and *Journey,* the force that epitomises and unravels the debate between the individual, the group and their intersections. It deals with deeper inner interrogations and individual solutions to situations that affect the whole community. The debate between the limits of the private and the public manifests in intense tensions between characters trying to redefine and negotiate their private spaces in a society that pressures them. The main tension originates as these negotiations on the individual, the unique and the private are, by

force, debated in public forcing the singular to convince the plural, the individual to challenge and overcome the group.

It is in this liminal space where texts such as *Alchemist*, *Journey* and *Shadow* make use of the EBT as a narrative abstraction, as a device to engage in the negotiations and rearrangements of the limits of individualism and collectivity in 21st century Japan. But these discussions are far from resolved and remain unsure and up for social debate. The individualistic trend some authors claim for Japan does not mean the development is irreversible or assured. And in this uncertain landscape, these texts engage in the debate on the moral and ethical consequences of the dichotomies and ambiguous boundaries between the self and the other. In a landscape of liquified limits, of uncertain categories, these texts explore through narratives and fictional worlds debates on the private and the collective offering their own approach, concerns and conflicts. I turn now to situate *Alchemist*, *Journey* and *Shadow* in the wider intertextual conversation, and to critically discuss their stance as discourses participating in this polyphonic debate. I thus read these texts as part of a socially situated and intentioned discourse speaking about and to the context from which they originate.

Conclusion

Everything is uncertain in the game-world of *Shadow*. There is not a single value or concept left unquestioned in the landscape

of ambiguities and paradoxes Ueda constructs. However, the more you transgress, the clearer it is on the defilement of the EBT. But not only does the EBT create for the committer an uncanny and supernatural existence capable defiling love, heroism and friendship, but it also surpasses individual consequences jeopardising the whole world. Breaching the boundaries of existence is a collective matter, one beyond singular desires and decisions, a consequence of the universally shared limits between life and death. But the EBT in *Shadow* acquires a greater negativity as it requires the active participation of its consumer. The transgression is lived, performed by the player, its consequences discovered but also caused by her/his actions. Only through a computer game may the EBT be engaged with in such a way that both designer and audience participate in the authorship of the transgression.

Shadow is about experiencing the EBT, about struggling to justify your actions and motivations. It is a complex and grim quest about destroying the world to satisfy our own inabilities to deal with the pain and suffering the passing of time brings to us humans.

Like the previous engagements, *Alchemist* and *Journey*, *Shadow* explores a human impulse that defies our own limits: the non-acceptance of death. But death's presence lures in the EBT, an attempt to overcome the last frontier.

But this rebellion clash is against the rules of the cosmos, rules which are observed and defended by the whole community. This conflict manifests two main challenges of 21st century Japan: the lack of attraction to belong and join an unappealing community and the individual impulse to follow and redefine personal freedom. Such tension brings serious challenges to the concept of collectiveness while it disintegrates the imagined and constructed Japanese community. These texts, *Alchemist*, *Journey* and *Shadow*, are discourses on that concern. They are explorations on the limits of absolute freedom while questioning the community's tools to persuade and captivate. This debate, these clashes, are still developing and changing, adapting to contextual variations and reacting to local, national and global tensions.

Conclusions

Tensions between individualism and sociocentrism, a constant since Postwar Japan, manifested in different discourses during the Lost Decades (Shimizu, 2000). From the year 2000 these debates took form through the EBT, a theme that channelled enquiries not only on humanity and the process of being, but also on their relations to the community. In a narrative landscape where the individual is praised for its entrepreneurial spirit, its execution of private freedom and love of risk, the EBT appears as an interrogation on the limits of such existential approach. As this PhD has argued, through popular culture and the EBT theme, different discourses have constructed narratives that challenge neoliberal voices that advocate for individual freedom above and against the group. Working for the EBT is working against nature, and attacking nature, or the workings of the cosmos, leads to the eventual destruction of the community.

In the Late 1990s neoliberal reformers like Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō accused the Japanese management system of being the main cause of the economic crisis. The criticism went further attributing the social and cultural problems of the country to the "interdependent relationships that hinder individuals from exercising initiative and developing entrepreneurship" (Takeda, 2008: 156). Koizumi and others advocated for a new narrative of risk and individual responsibility while the government asked the

Japanese people to become strong independent individuals ready to bear “the heavy weight of freedom” (Miyazaki, 2010: 243). The interdependent ties that joined and maintained groups, communities and a sense of belonging were further attacked and portrayed as the enemies of progress and the nation’s survival in a changing world order. But the dismantling of the old corporate system, the disintegration of families and households and the decrease in interpersonal relationships left many insecure, precarious and in isolation.

As the attacks on communalism continued new narratives pushed forward on prising the individualistic agenda, one in which only the singular’s desires and capacities matter. As a consequence, on January 31, 2010 the NHK labelled Japan as a “relationless society”. The “lonely death” phenomenon became its iconic example as thirty-two thousand Japanese died at home all alone in 2009. Furthermore, one-third of the population was living without company, including 23 percent of people aged sixty-five or above (Allison, 2015: 45). Lonely death became the iconic example of the “relationless society”. But the term included a pronounced decay or dissolution of social bounds in every sphere. The Japanese were increasingly living in isolation. Different figures and social issues were brought up to confirm this alarming claim. Demographically the population was shrinking,

childbirth steadily declining, as well as the number of couples getting married.

The phrase of the “relationless society” started to spread around the country being widely discussed. The Asahi Shimbun launched a series on Japan’s “tribeless society”, a society where no one joins or forms groups. Everywhere words for “relationships”, “bonds”, and “ties” became mainstream, especially after the 3.11 Tōhoku disaster (Allison, 2015: 46). The family became a central theme of discussion as its health was paralleled to that of social life itself. But family itself as an institution showed symptoms of change, if not decay. With the rate of divorce steadily increasing the overall household size decreased. While in 1947 8.5 out of 100 couples divorced in 2015 the number increased to 35.6 (Ogihara, 2017: 5). But the problem in this “relationless society” is not only the disintegration of families but the lack of new bonds being formed.

Furthermore, the emotional cost of “new individualism” and its discourses manifested in different forms of anxieties and distrusts (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Elliott and Lemert, 2009). Since the 1990s people’s anxiety was characterised by sociologists as existential anxiety: deep uneasiness towards groups, relationships or social things (Lemert, 1997). There, if people before had kept their trust in the existence of groups or relationships such confidence vanished. This emergence of

individualistic anxiety meant a sense of exclusion from groups, relationships or even society itself. Such existential anxiety became what Anthony Giddens calls ontological insecurity, a lack of sense of order and continuity according to individual's experiences (1991). In a rapidly changing cultural and social landscape, uncertainty increased and altered the ontological, ethical and existential landscape. In that era of fragmentation, precarity and unpredictability the testing of the ultimate boundaries comes both as logic enterprise of absolute freedom and a fearful interrogation of its limits and consequences.

To link both the EBT and the contextual conversations of the Second Lost Decade this PhD has focused on a study of the mediality of these texts, on how they have constructed their messages, what these messages were discussing regarding the EBT and what the theme was saying about its context. This PhD has, therefore, presented a focused investigation on the EBT, its origins, construction and changing ontology. It has, then, linked it to its context and through its abstract and allegorical capacities. Once the EBT was properly understood I have studied the theme within each of the media and texts selected. This process is better explained in the summary of the project which I therefore present.

Summary

The contents of this PhD have been presented in what might be considered a two-part structure. The introduction and the first chapter are mostly focused on the presentation of both the theme and its context. While the introduction primes a presentation on the main theme to be discussed and the texts to be used, the following chapter deals with the intertextuality surrounding the EBT. The second part is the study of the sample. Three chapters explore and discuss the EBT through its representation in different media: a manga, an anime film and a computer game. The overall organisation within each of them first presents some theoretical and methodological approaches to the medium, a narrative thick description of its content and an analytical study of the representation of the EBT. Each chapter has its own aim and argument and its own role in the overall PhD as they contribute to answer the research question and are guided by the main argument. That argument developed during the first two chapters relates the EBT in the Second Lost Decade to previous interrogations on the boundaries and categories of a liquified Japanese ontological landscape. For further detail I offer an extended presentation of each section.

The introduction of this PhD has offered an overview of the main overlaying areas of Japanese culture that influence the theme of study: the transgressions of life and death boundaries. This

theme, which appeared in Ancient Japan, permeated new popular media as their main dramatic tension in the Second Lost Decade (2000-2010). The introduction started by discussing the relevance and influence of discourses on death and afterlife in Japan. As religious texts were the first to leave a trace on the interrogations about the netherworld the introduction focused on how and what the main religions of Japan added to the conversation.

However, the role and centrality of religious institutions in Japan have shifted losing their social relevance. That change was partially addressed by the fantastic, a genre that focused on the construction of the uncanny cosmoi. Fantasy, because of its characteristics, offered a new approach and position from which to explore the themes of death and the netherworld. It is in that logic of the shifting to fantasy that popular culture and new media joined the conversation. There are texts from visual media such as manga, anime and computer games engaged in ancient and perennial themes and discussions. Interrogations on life and death were not an exception and, as these texts are part of the discursive debate on afterlife I argued about their relevance and the necessity to pay attention to them as expressions of contemporary Japan.

To deepen the historical development of the EBT, the first chapter offered an overview of the genealogy of the theme in

question. Since this PhD is interested in the discussion of the relation of life and death and their boundaries, Chapter I introduced the EBT theme. The theme presents narratives in which a main character journeys from the world of the living to the world of the dead to bring a loved one back. It appeared in the *Kojiki* in 712 and, being a foundational text for Japanese mythology, has been discussed by different disciplines.

Chapter I had three purposes: to discuss the development and journey of the theme through different periods and media; to show the relevance of the EBT as a theme that has reappeared and remained central in Japanese narratives and to link the EBT in contemporary Japan to its context. But it also shows that by its different variations it maintains a main structure while it introduces changes and worries from its context. The EBT then, as it appears for the first time in new visual media, incorporates themes and concerns from the discussions and debates of 21st century Japan.

Chapter II, the first of the analytical chapters tests both the argument, and the understanding of the contextual motives and discussions of contemporary Japan studying the EBT in the medium of manga. *Full Metal Alchemist* is the first of these media texts to use the EBT as its main structuring theme. By a combination of theories that deal with discourse analysis and the study of visual storytelling Chapter II argued that *Alchemist* offers

a deeply complex and ambiguous polyphony regarding the EBT. By that I mean that the kind of approach and solution offered was unresolved as the EBT is framed as extensively negative while its alternative, the reinsertion to the community, maintains unresolved issues. Thus, despite the fact that the EBT is framed as indisputably negative, the community that leads to the transgression is, as well, full of contradictions and defilement.

But a second conclusion from the study of *Alchemist* shows that the EBT, despite maintaining its ancient structure, fills it with themes and concerns from its social, cultural and historical context. Then, the representation of pollution, boundaries and punishment relates to contemporary conceptualisations of such ideas. *Alchemist* also shows that the main concern regarding the EBT has more to do now with the tension between the transgressor as an individualist and the community he is not attacking but which he despises. The main central concern lies in that conflict between the impulse to act against the deontologically moral and the reinforcement of the laws and rules of the cosmos we all share.

This main tension and the depiction of a communal law enforced from nature is the central moral message in the anime *Journey to Agartha.* As Chapter III argues, *Journey* has aimed to distance the audience from the transgressor depicting him (and his EBT) as an untrustworthy, as an individual who would commit evil acts

due to his self-centred obsession. To oppose the EBT and convince the viewer, *Journey* presents an alternative: the “flow of nature”. That concept vindicates the acceptance of the workings of the cosmos. Through its protagonist, Asuna, *Journey* not only portrays the flow of nature as something unavoidable but also as a force external and superior to humans that maintains and protects the balance of the world. Death, as part of life, is therefore not a negative event but one that maintains the flow of the world allowing every being to be part of something greater than a singular physical manifestation.

Finally, Chapter IV studies the EBT through the computer game *Shadow of the Colossus*. This medium requires the participation of the player, and thus constructs a different relation between the player and the played object based on the former’s agency. However, the design of the game still controls and forces a structured experience in a player who, in the case of *Shadow* needs to transgress to play. *Shadow* thus delves into the effects of responsibility, freedom and moral conflicts in a text in which the viewer now needs to actively participate. But as I argued, the player’s forced agency intensifies instead of compromises the ethical message of *Shadow*. The EBT is depicted as an evil and selfish act, one only moral imbeciles would commit as it risks the existence of the world. *Shadow*’s aim is not only to bring

discussions of evilness and individual freedom up but also to make its audience experience how being evil feels.

This overview has shown the different themes and debates this PhD engages with. These results present several implications for the literature on contemporary Japan. To explore these implications more thoroughly the conclusion expands on the implications of this PhD and the themes it studies.

Contributions of the Work

This PhD has focused on the theme of the transgression of life and death boundaries through its representation in Japanese contemporary visual media. By addressing how the theme was constructed by three different media and what these texts say about it, I have focused on the narrativization of Japanese ontological anxieties. As I have argued, although these texts deal with matters of afterlife through fantasy worlds, the content of their stories, the archetypes of their characters and their existential journeys echo contextually-situated conversations. Matters of gender, society structure and, most of all, the tensions between individuality and sociocentrism not only permeate but structure the interrogation of our relation to the afterlife. Therefore, this PhD, what it discusses and how it addresses such debates aims to contribute to various areas of study.

Most immediately, this study was framed within the discipline of media studies. Its approach comes from its overlaying anthropological approach which focuses on human communication (Geertz, 1973; Ecco, 1975). In 21st century Japan the most consumed discourses and modes of public expression appear in the form of popular media such as manga, anime and computer games. Each of them has their own particularities, language, modes and limitations. An intermedial approach, therefore, is not only concerned with what or how a mediated text communicates, but also on the implications for the medium itself. This PhD has maintained that focus, an interest on that dual mediation that interrogates the EBT theme while questioning the role of the medium in the society and culture in which it performs the act of communicating. Therefore, for the study of new popular media in Japan this PhD offers two main points of interest.

The first of these contributions has to do with the mentioned intermedial approach. Each of these media is studied focusing first how it works, the way in which its modes construct a discourse, and therefore a differentiated experience. The medium is the protagonist in this first part, while the message is then subtracted from how the story is told. The second point of interest has to do with the debate on the relevance of these media. Far from justifying manga, anime or computer games study based on their economic success, their socio-cultural

presence, or any kind of essence that makes them stand out, I based my interest on what they are and what they do. New media discourses are the ways and channels by which people communicate their intake on the contextual concerns of their time. In the case of the afterlife theme it is used by these media as an abstraction to question matters regarding the tensions in the society and the culture to which they belong. These media are relevant and interesting to be studied for they are expressions of the people that compose and negotiate the state of Japanese culture and society.

While form and medium links this PhD to media studies, its theme and the conversation in which it engages relates it to Religious Studies and especially their state in contemporary Japan. Since secularism and the steadly decline of Buddhism in Japan, the doctrine's monopoly over death has been contested for at least two decades. New rites to honour or separate from the dead have fragmented both ritual and discoursal interrogations about afterlife. The EBT is an expression of these challenges to the boundaries between life and death, to the way in which the living relates to the dead and even to our ontological and existential approaches to what being a human means.

The EBT is an abstraction, I have argued, one that discusses relations between individuals and the group, but eventually to nature and the cosmos. But these more immediate or

contextually situated concerns are framed within the structure of a theme that has been a matter of discussion and consideration regarding mythological and religious texts. This does not mean that the representation of the EBT in these media has any doctrinal pretensions. These fantasy texts are explorations on the possibilities of different cosmoi, vital options and constraints. Still, they share the same interest of religious conversations on human nature, life, death, their boundaries and connections.

The last of the main points of interests of this PhD has to do with ethics and morality. The philosophical backbone of the EBT is an interrogation of the morality of the transgression and the ethical dilemmas it brings about. The main theme intersects with matters of responsibility, individual freedom, free will and tensions between individual and communal needs and desires. The EBT is regarded as an evil and immoral act that must be punished. A combination of deontological and consequential ethics constrains the transgression, an act that leads the whole story forward and opens the question to how the transgressor would justify it. Matters of freedom, power and responsibility are constantly brought up. Consequently, the EBT is a recurrent interrogation on the ethics and morals of contemporary Japan. This negotiation has been a primary concern of this study, which aimed to shed some light on concerns about the metaphysics of moral dilemmas and ethical conflicts.

As can be seen from the contributions of this PhD its main relevance comes from the interdisciplinary and intermedial empirical approach to the relations between media, theme and context. However, although this is a research that can be of interest to religious studies, contemporary Japanese studies or popular culture studies its main area of interest comes from a combination of media studies and the implication of the EBT for contextual issues and concerns of contemporary Japanese culture. Such interest comes from the intersection between the abstraction of the EBT and its relation to culture and the clashing narratives of 21st century Japan: a relation better understood through an overview of the PhD and how this link is constructed and discussed in its different chapters.

Research Implications

A major implication of this PhD comes from its approach to the EBT theme as a product derived and intensely intertwined with its context. As I have argued, the study of the EBT offers the opportunity to understand both the role of new communicative devices and their relevance as voices echoing cultural concerns. In that regard, I have approached these EBT discourses not only as manifestations of their cultural, social or historical background but also as products that influence their context back.

In regard to the influences of the context, I argue that these EBT engagements originate from previous boundary interrogations

and challenges. This link to the surrounding debates situates the sample within an older tradition of questioning of categories and their boundaries. I thus study the EBT's reappearance within a timeframe in which death discourses and interrogations recover part of their centrality. But part of the relevance of the theme comes from the inclusion of more immediate social and cultural motives. Thus, the moral message these texts present addresses various conflicts and clashes in contemporary Japan.

As advanced, the major tension related to the EBT has to do with debates on the tensions between individualism and sociocentrism. This concern, that has rapidly increased its relevance since the 1990s has become a central interrogation in 21st century Japan. This raises relevant questions about discourses on the individual and the community in 21st century Japan. Individualism and sociocentrism were widely explored in Postwar times, especially during the Anpo, Beheiren and Student Movement. However, now the term has gained a new centrality with projects, policies and discourses reverting the dominance of the group over the singular.

The EBT, and how it is portrayed in the Second Lost Decade reflects the deep and widespread worry on the disintegration of families, groups, communities and even humanity. This concern is situated in two levels. On the one hand, there is an immediate fear of loneliness and isolation, the anxiety from a world of

companionless individuals manifests in several discourses now permeating the EBT. On the other hand, the recurrent motif of the destruction of the world not only accuses the transgressor of being responsible for such calamity but it also constructs a logic: extreme individualism brings the end of human society. This is a dual catastrophe where individuals live and die alone lacking companionship and in which such a trend ends up destroying the whole of humanity.

All these three engagements on the EBT criticise and attack what they argue to be an extreme individualistic approach. In fact, this transgression is used to explore the limits of unrestrained individualism. If the community does not matter and one should only listen to his or her own desires contractual norms and rules are up to be disobeyed at will. One is only responsible for his own actions, and nothing else, not even the consequences. The community thus only disturbs the individual's full realisation by constraining and harnessing freedom. These explorations on the EBT, nonetheless, represent intense discomfort and mistrust towards unrestrained freedom and self-absorbed realisation.

The study of these texts and their framing of the EBT thus contributes to a better understanding of how and what popular culture products say about this conflicted relation between individuals and the group. Thus, while a part of academic literature sees the individual trend initiated and fostered by the

government as an increasingly irreversible trend, popular culture aimed to the younger generations proves otherwise. The prevalence of one option over another is still under heated debate. Paying attention to these texts thus shows how resisting communitarian discourses are far stronger and underestimated.

Thus, while there is a whole literature that praises loneliness and solitarianism, it is mainly aimed at adults who, in part, comply with a situation in which they feel already involved ((Lewis, 2018). This PhD shifts the focus of the debate to discourses aimed to the younger public. These texts are designed and created by a team of young adults whose messages criticise and challenge the ideals of unattached individualism and the pursuit of own self-absorbed goals. By studying these texts, I have presented the resistance that is coming from new popular culture products, the distrust from young designers, writers and artists to neoliberal cultural policies. But also, while these discourses question a shifting world, they aim to make sense of the change, of a liquifying landscape. As these texts are widely consumed and distributed among a young audience this might result in a long-term reconfiguration and negotiation of the balance between both opposing poles.

A second implication of the texts and the EBT has to do with their discussion and exploration on the moral and ethical issues of contemporary Japan. The EBT is in itself a moral conflict, an

exercise of internal reflection and collective negotiation. Through the challenging of essential boundaries, the transgressor must engage communitarian conversations that surpass his private sphere. As the rules and norms are constructed and enforced by the collective only a change in the group can grant the acceptance of the EBT, and consequently its success. These engagements, however, have shown a constant agreement among every text: the defilement of the transgression and the benefits of respecting the laws of the cosmos. The communal overpowers and prevails framing the conduct and behaviour of the transgressors as defiled, wrong or even evil.

There, different ethical and moral considerations challenge the EBT. Both deontological and consequential ethics, attack the transgression as an unethical act. Deontological ethics criticises the EBT based on the breaching of essential norms and rules the community respect as they come imposed from an observation of the workings of the cosmos. Attacking those rules harms the whole functioning of the world and jeopardises life by aiming to prolonged it forever. Denying death means denying life. On the other hand, consequential ethics reinforces the negativity of the EBT based on the effects of the transgression. Consequentalism, priming the solution that would increase the good criticises the EBT based on its appocalyptic consequences.

Therefore, the main moral conflict the EBT brings about derives from the pain and suffering it creates. Thus, although the transgressors are not represented as evil beings their actions are so self-absorbed that they cause calamity and evil results. Extreme individualism is portrayed as an immoral existential approach. It harms both the singular and the collective being, jeopardising the balance of the world risking its existence. The EBT is, consequently, an ontological investigation on ethics and morals in contemporary Japan. All these texts communicate to their audiences the ethical limits of pursuing their own selfish needs. They advocate not only for paying respect to the community but also for the benefits to both joining and shaping it. Every painful situation is relieved within and by the group, or by constructing it. The message is to be the community, to belong and work with it.

Nonetheless, the questions the EBT raises are still problematic and the ways to work within the community ambiguous and unresolved. As well as the previous debates on the tensions between individualism and sociocentrism (Shimizu, 2000), or between the moral and immorality of the EBT, how to belong to the community and what community to create is up to negotiation. These conversations are far from being resolved, increasing their relevance in Japanese culture and their discursive presence. Only by further research and focus on how

people respond and continue these conversations can we aim to comprehend the dimensions and development of these central issues in Japan.

Future Work

This PhD has offered a focused study of the construction of the EBT theme in contemporary Japanese media. To do so it has focused on the texts that have engaged the conversation, their context and the relation between both. However, there is a main point, a relevant piece of the conversation that it has not been able to cover: the reception by the audience.

There are several reasons that would justify the relevance of conducting further research on that subject. The first has to do with the focus of this PhD, which has centred on the first part of the communicative flow. This first part corresponds to the encoding and transmission of the message. Thus, the chapters have focused on the semiotic process, that is the construction of meaning, its narrative features and the relation to the context from which it originates. The intention was to understand every text within its social, cultural and historical conditions of production.

Moreover, a big part of this PhD has dealt with the debates the EBT tackles, its abstraction and influence on the contextual worries and concerns of 21st century Japan. A focus on the hermeneutical process of the audience would aid our

comprehension of the response and social pragmatic recurrence of these texts. In other words, I propose a focus on how the audience has consumed these texts, the discourses they have produced in that regard, and their social use of the content and forms. As these new media are part of wider conversations, it is necessary to study how the texts are being used by their audiences while discussing the themes they engage with. In other words, the question would be how audiences debate on the tensions these texts bring up.

Consequently, a focus on the audience discourses, conversations and debates would allow for a more extensive comprehension of the dimensions and forms in which these themes are collectively addressed. Now it has been addressed how writers and artists construct texts to foster such discussions it is time to shift the attention and focus on the repercussions and impact of these debates. Thus, as interesting as these texts and their messages are, so too is the reception, comprehension and use of the themes they bring up. If the EBT presents a moral conflict, we now need to ask how the options are experienced by the audience. We know these texts criticise the EBT, does the audience agree with that take? Is there anyone defending the EBT? And if so, on which grounds? Furthermore, is the EBT considered an evil act by the public? Or do they agree with the individualistic pursuit of the protagonists? In other words, what is

the audience saying about the ethical tensions these texts raise, and what does this say about the debates the EBT offers?

Therefore, the central point of attention of future research on the EBT, the themes it raises or their representation in popular media should investigate their reception and the discourses, debates and narratives generated. Such work might be conducted through interviews with the audience, interactions in the magazines and internet forums or questionnaires. Qualitative research that focuses on the reader, viewer or player of these products will tackle questions regarding the continuation of these conversations and the role of the texts as catalysers of public engagements on individualism and collectivism in Japan. Furthermore, the advantage of such approach would complete the flow of information and the collective construction of meaning. This would give a audience the relevant role as active components in the hermeneutical process of negotiating socio-cultural issues of contemporary Japan and complete our understanding on the process of constructing ethical, ontological and existential systems.

Final Words

Much is yet to be discussed about the development of the conversations the EBT has tackled. As a new decade opened with the 3.11 of 2011, these existential debates acquired new forms and themes around which they constructed their

narratives. The EBT seemed to vanish from popular discourses, and yet, the impact it left remained in the recurrence of texts such as *Alchemist* and its multimedia franchise or the remastering of *Shadow* in 2011 and 2018. Besides, the ethical explorations and the interrogation of individualism the EBT reflected are now debated all around Japan. The clashes of narratives remain in a fragmented polyphonic landscape.

Future research should thus focus on the construction and the effects of these public discourses, and as important, on the social tensions they reflect and affect. That has been the main aim of this PhD. First, to give the voices and modes of expressions that engaged in the EBT conversation the relevance they deserve. Second, to link what these texts are discussing to the experiences they construct and to reflect on their anxieties and hopes. The EBT is a human construction, a dynamic force that reflects what matters to those that debate about it. Thus, through the crafting of EBT discourses, their transmission and interpretation we observe ontological interrogations on what it means to be, an existential enquiry into the process of being and how these are understood by those participating in them.

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Appendix

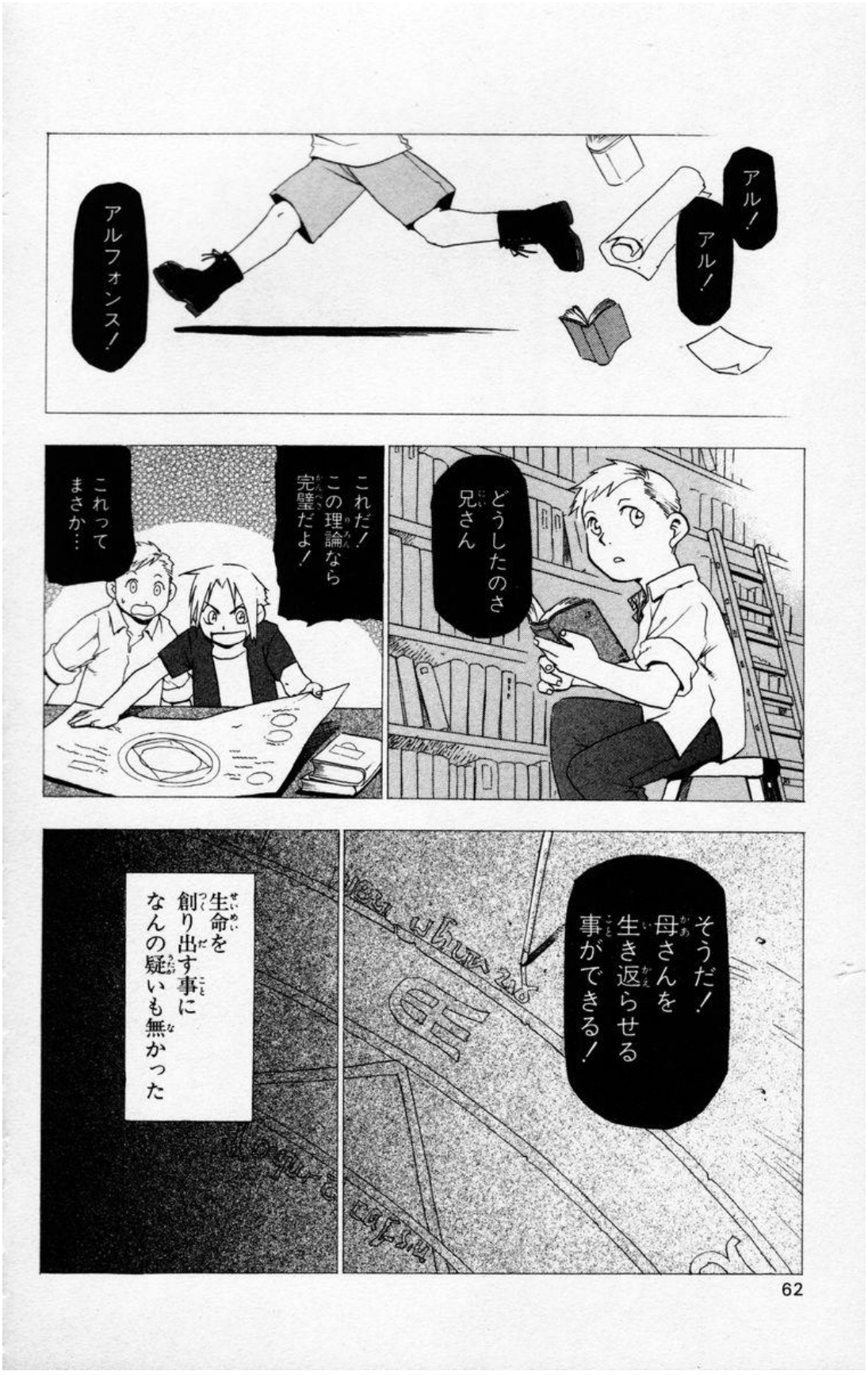
Chapter II Appendix

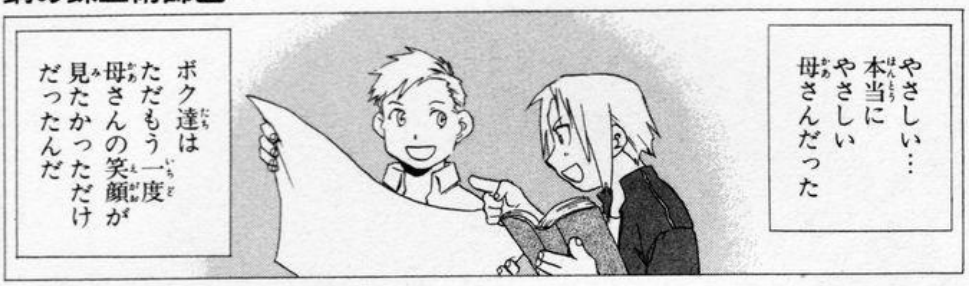
1st Scene:


…なるほど
そうか
貴様…
なぜ こんなガキが
〝鋼〟なんぞという
厳い称号を
掲げているのか
不思議で
ならなかったが…
ガシャ
そういう
訳か…
ロゼ
この者達はな
錬金術師の間では
暗黙のうちに
禁じられている
「人体錬成」を…


最大の禁忌を
犯しおったのよ!!


第2話
命の代価
…!!
「太陽に
近づきすぎた英雄は
翼をもがれて
地に墜とされる」
…ってな


アル！
アル！
アルフォンス！
どうしたのさ
兄さん
これだ！
この理論なら
完璧だよ！
これって
まさか…
そうだ！
母さんを
生き返らせる
事ができる！
生命を
創り出す事に
なんの疑いも無かった
62


やさしい…
本当に
やさしい
母さんだった
ボク達は
ただもう一度
母さんの笑顔が
見たかっただけ
だったんだ


たとえそれが
錬金術の禁忌に
ふれていても
それだけのために
ボク達は
錬金術を鍛えて
きたんだから…


錬成は
失敗だった

63

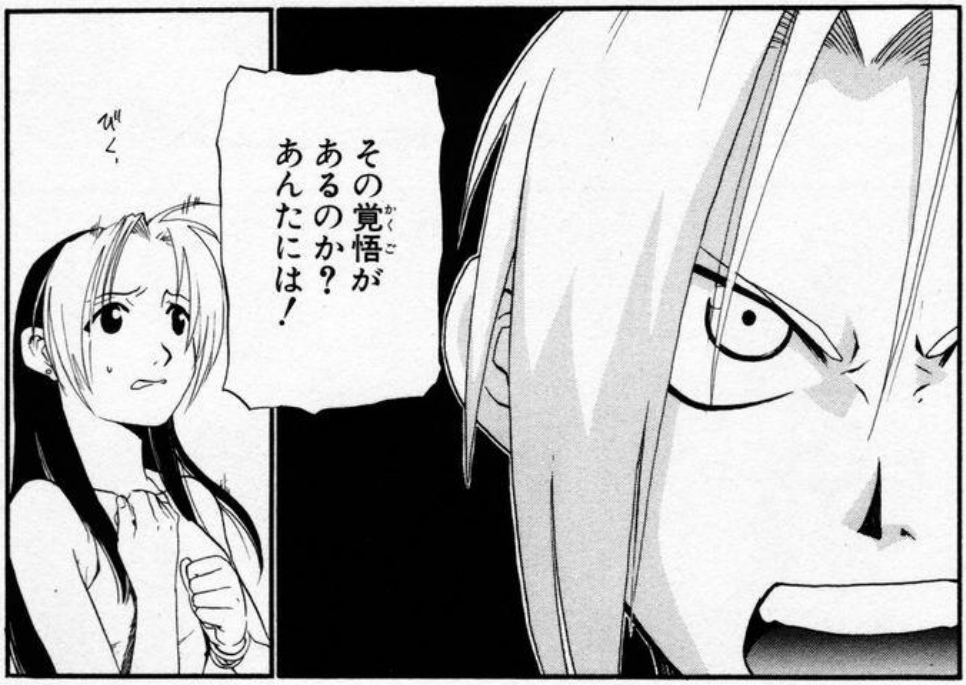

錬成の過程で
兄さんは左足を
ボクは
身体を全部
持って行かれた
ボクの意識は
そこで一度
途切れ…
次に目を
開けた時に
見たものは
この鎧の身体と
血の海の中の——
へへ…ごめんな
右手一本じゃ
おまえの魂しか
錬成できなかったよ
なんて
無茶を…!!


兄さんは
左足を
失ったままの
重傷で…
今度は
ボクの魂を
その右腕と
引き替えに
錬成して
この鎧に
定着させたんだ
へっ…
二人がかりで
一人の人間を
甦らせようとして
このザマだ…
ロゼ
人を甦らせるって
ことは
こういうことだ
その覚悟が
あるのか？
あんたには！
びく、


くくく…
エドワード・エルリック!!
貴様それで
国家錬金術師とは!!
これが笑わずに
いられるか!?
うっせーんだよ
石が無きゃ
何もできねぇ
どサンピンが!
なるほど
なるほど
それで賢者の石を
欲するか
そうだなあ
これを使えば
人体錬成も
成功するかもなぁ?
くっくっく
カン違い
すんなよハゲ!
石が欲しいのは
元の身体に
戻るためだ
もっとも
元に戻れるかも
だけどな…!
教主さん
もう一度言う
痛い目
見ないうちに
石をボク達に
渡してほしい


兄さんは
左足を
失ったままの
重傷で…
今度は
ボクの魂を
その右腕と
引き替えに
錬成して
この鎧に
定着させたんだ


へっ…
二人がかりで
一人の人間を
甦らせようとして
このザマだ…
ロゼ
人を甦らせるって
ことは
こういうことだ


その覚悟が
あるのか？
あんたには！
びく

65


何かを得ようと
するなら
それなりの代価を
払わなければいけない
兄さんも
「天才」だなんて
言われてるけど
「努力」という代価を
払ったからこそ
今の兄さんがあるんだ
でも
そこまでの
犠牲を払った
からには
お母さんは
ちゃんと…
人の形を
していなかった


そんな…
なんで!!
兄さんの理論は
完璧だった
はずだ!!
ああ
理論上では
間違っちゃ
いなかった…
間違ってたのは
オレ達だ…
人体錬成は
あきらめたけど
それでも兄さんは
ボクの身体だけでも
元に戻そうと
してくれてる
ボクだって
兄さんを
元に戻して
やりたい
でも
そのリスクが
大きいのは
さっき
話した通り…
報いを受け
命を落とす
かもしれない
ボク達が
選んだのは
そういう
業の道だ
……!!

1st page:

- Panel 1. Father Cornello interrupts the fighting with the brothers as he has discovered something about the brothers.
- Panel 2. Ed's does not show any emotion as Cornello shows that he has figured out the origin of Ed's name.
- Rose listens in agony as Cornello tells her that the brothers have committed the most elemental and prohibition: human transmutation.

2nd page:

- Panel 1. A mad Cornello stresses and reiterates that they have committed the greatest crime
- Panel 2. Ed throws away his cape clearly revealing the marks of their transgression: a mechanic arm and leg while advancing towards Cornello. Al, however, remains on his empty armour.
- Panel 3. Still paralyzed hears again the words of the old Icarus' legend: "trying to get too close to the Sun God the hero made some wings that broke so he fell and crush to the ground…"

Flashback:

1st page:

- Panel 1. An excited younger Ed runs calling Al leaving books and papers behind.
- Panel 2. Reading on their library Al waits for his brother.
- Panel 3. Ed unfolds a paper with different transmutation circles and notes as he tells Al that he had found a theory that will success.
- Panel 4. Ed, against his brother's doubt shows certainty of their capacity to bring their mother back to life as he goes over the transmutation circle lines
- Panel 5. The voice of Al narrates that they were convinced about their success on bringing their mum back to life

2nd page:

- Panel 1. Ed and Al, motivated by the wish to see once again their gentle mother lively research how to put the human transmutation into practice
- Panel 2. A room full of books and objects from a time long go accompanies the brothers recognizing of their determination to try the transmutation even they knew it was prohibited.
- Panel 3. A completely black scene with the revelation that the transmutation failed.

3rd page:

- Panel 1. A black spiral surrounds Ed and takes his left leg.

- Panel 2. The same spiral takes Al's body just before he lost consciousness.
- Panel 3. Al opens his eyes again to see his brother covered in blood missing both his left leg and right arm.
- Panel 4. The armour to which Al discovers his soul has been fixed helps Ed to incorporate. Ed apologizes while Al reproaches his brother for risking his own life.

Back to Cornello's mansion

Page 1:

- Panel 1. Al finishes his narration explaining that, although suffering from the loss of his leg, Edo manage to trade his arm for Al's soul and fixed to the armour.
- Panel 2. Ed, smiling takes over the narration and advices Rose that attempting to revive a human brings such terrible consequences.
- Panel 3. A terrified Rose hears Ed's conclusive comments about the prize of human transmutation.
- Panel 4-5. An angry Ed (panel 4) asks a doubtful Rose (panel 5) if she has the resolution to do that.

Now I present the translation of the last two pages of the fragment which, again, appear ten pages after this first part:

1st Page:

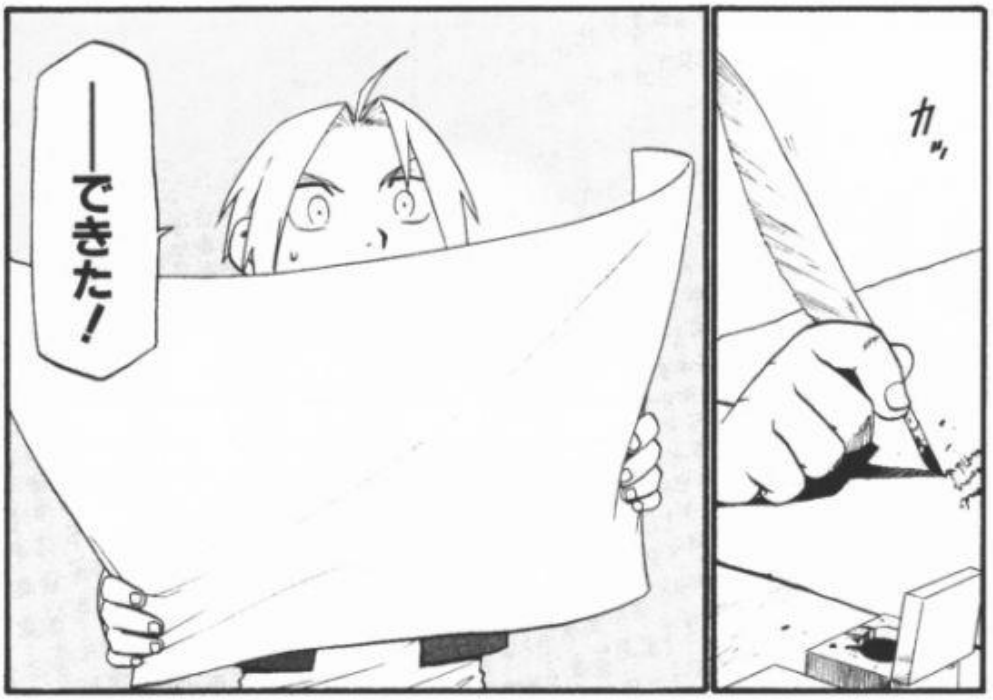
- Panel 1. Al and Rose wait with outside Cornello's mansion for Ed to uncover the priest plan. Al tells Rose about equal trade, that even Ed had to pay for the powers he now possess.
- Panel 2. A worried and tired Rose tries to cheer Al up by reminding him that at least their mother is alive again
- Panel 3. Al remains silent, looking gloom and down
- Panel 4. A flashback image presents Al (as an armour) holding Ed's mutilated body. He is looking up to the transmutation circle from where only the human arm, long black hair and blood from the revived being is visible. Al tells Rose: "That form was not human"

2nd Page:

- Panel 1. A scared and astonish Rose trembles
- Panel 2. Again as a flashback. Al holding Ed covers his eyes. "This can't be happening" he says "Brother's theory was right". He then accepts it, it was no the theory what was incorrect
- Panel 3. Ed, terrified, looks at his bloodied remaining hand. "The theory was not incorrect" says Al "we were"

- Panel 4. Al looks distracted while talking to Rose, who stares quietly at him. Al stress again that they have quit on human transmutation. All they want is to get back to their original form
- Panel 5. Al is finishing a transmutation circle as he confess that their path is risky, they may even lose their lives while trying. “But that is the path we have chosen” he finishes

2nd Scene:


カッ
——できた！


キャアッ
水35ℓ
炭素20kg
アンモニア4ℓ
石灰1.5kg
リン800g
塩分250g
硝石100g
イオウ80g
フッ素7.5g
鉄5g
ケイ素3g…

70


ボコ
あちちっ
気をつけろよ！
母さんの元に
なるんだから
えへへ
母さんに
会ったら
最初に
なんて言おう
決まってんだろ
「師匠には
だまっといて」だ！
あはは！
大人一人分の
身体を構成する
元素……
カリカリ
構築式…

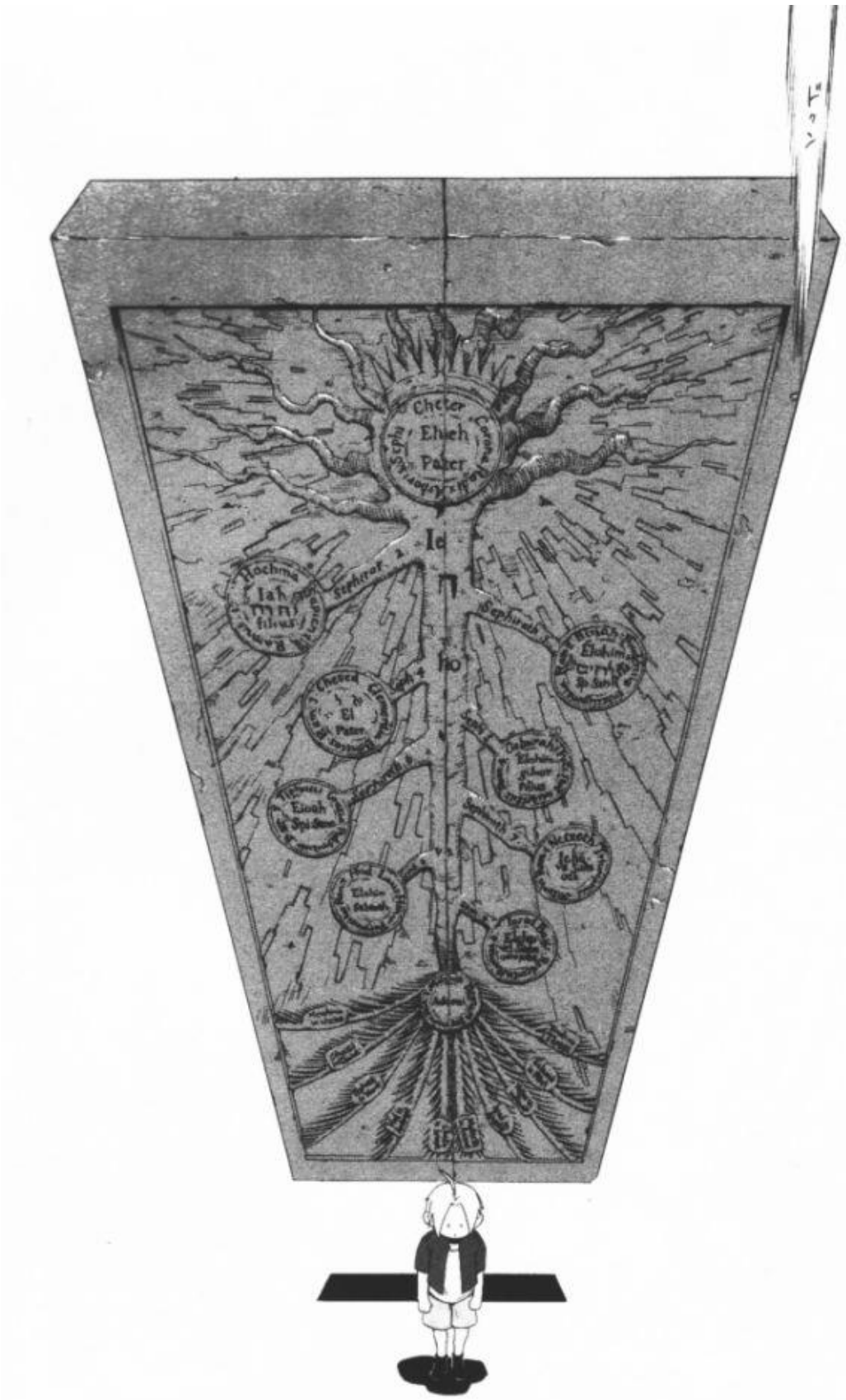
71


そして…
いてっ
魂の情報……
バシン!
いくぞアル
うん
72

73


オォ
オォ
オォ
オ
アル!!
バキ
リバウンドだ!!
バキ
バキバキ


兄さん
兄さん
兄さ
アル
ッ!!


Chetet
Eheh
Pater
Ie
Hochma
Iah
filius
Sephirot
Sephirah
El
Pater
Eloh
Spiritus
Sanctus
Elohim
Elohim
Pater
Filius
Elohim
Spiritus
Sanctus
Adonai

77

78


オレは
おまえ達が
〝世界〟と
呼ぶ存在
あるいは〝宇宙〟
あるいは〝神〟
あるいは〝真理〟
あるいは〝全〟
あるいは〝一〟
そして
オレは
〝おまえ〟だ

79

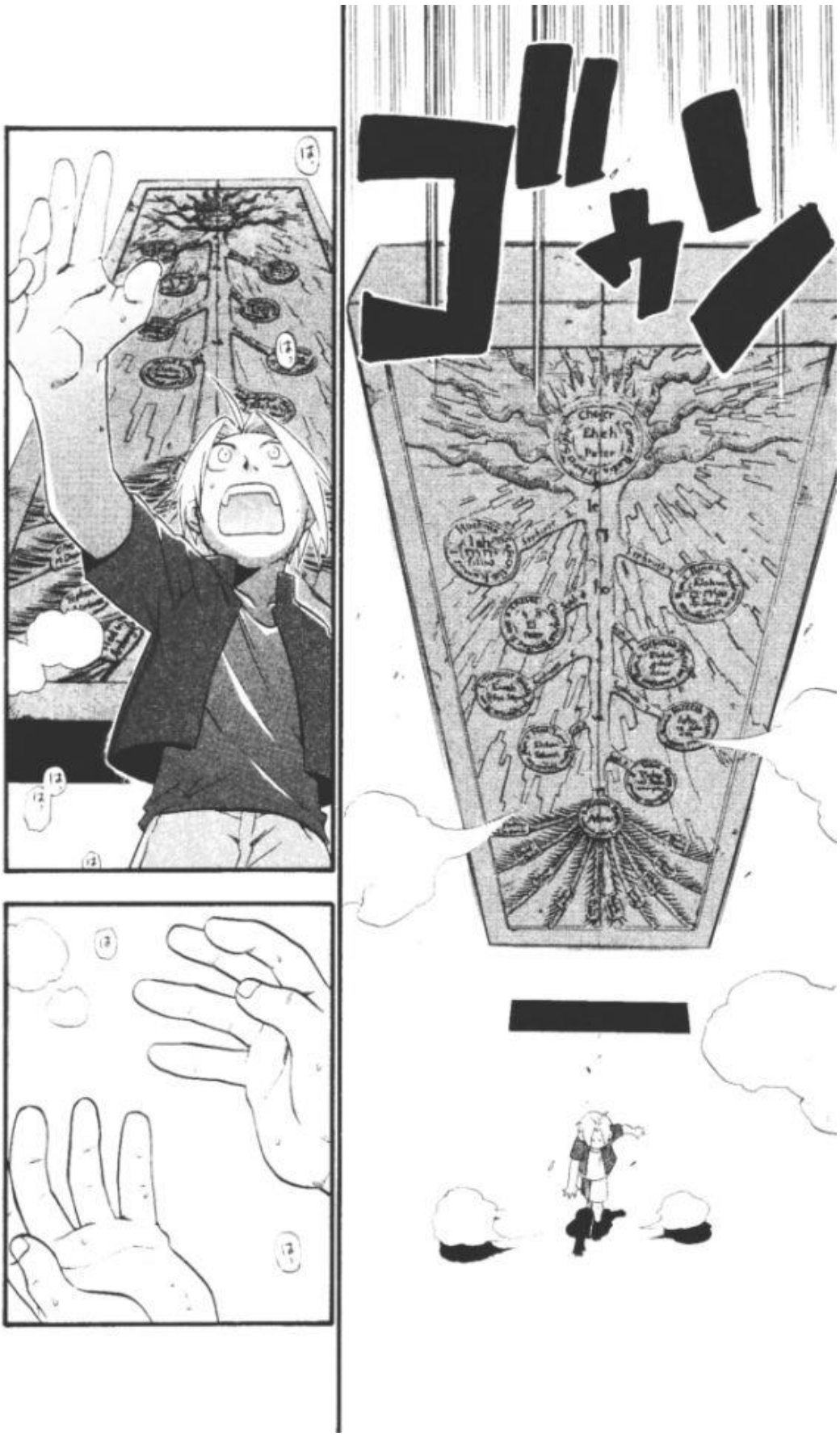

ようこそ
身の程知らずの
バカ野郎
ゴゴゴゴゴゴゴ
ガバ
うわあああああああ
バキバキバキバキ
うるさいな
おまえが欲しがってた物だぞ？
80

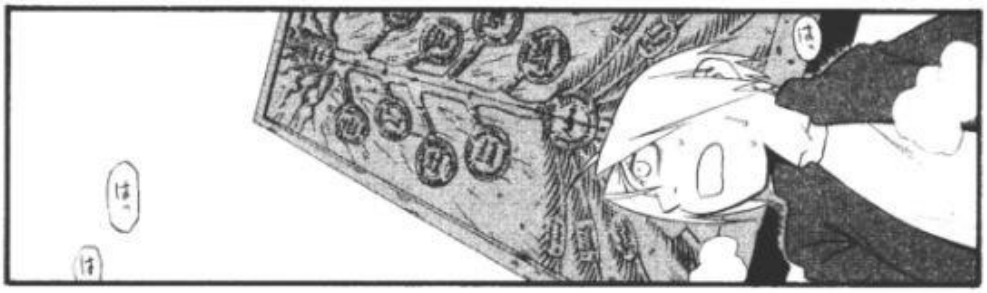
81


ズッ
なんだこれは!!!

84


や……
かあ……


ゴゥン


は、
は、
は


どうだった？


これが……真理…！


……ものすごい量の情報を脳に直接ぶち込まれたみたいで……頭がガンガンする……

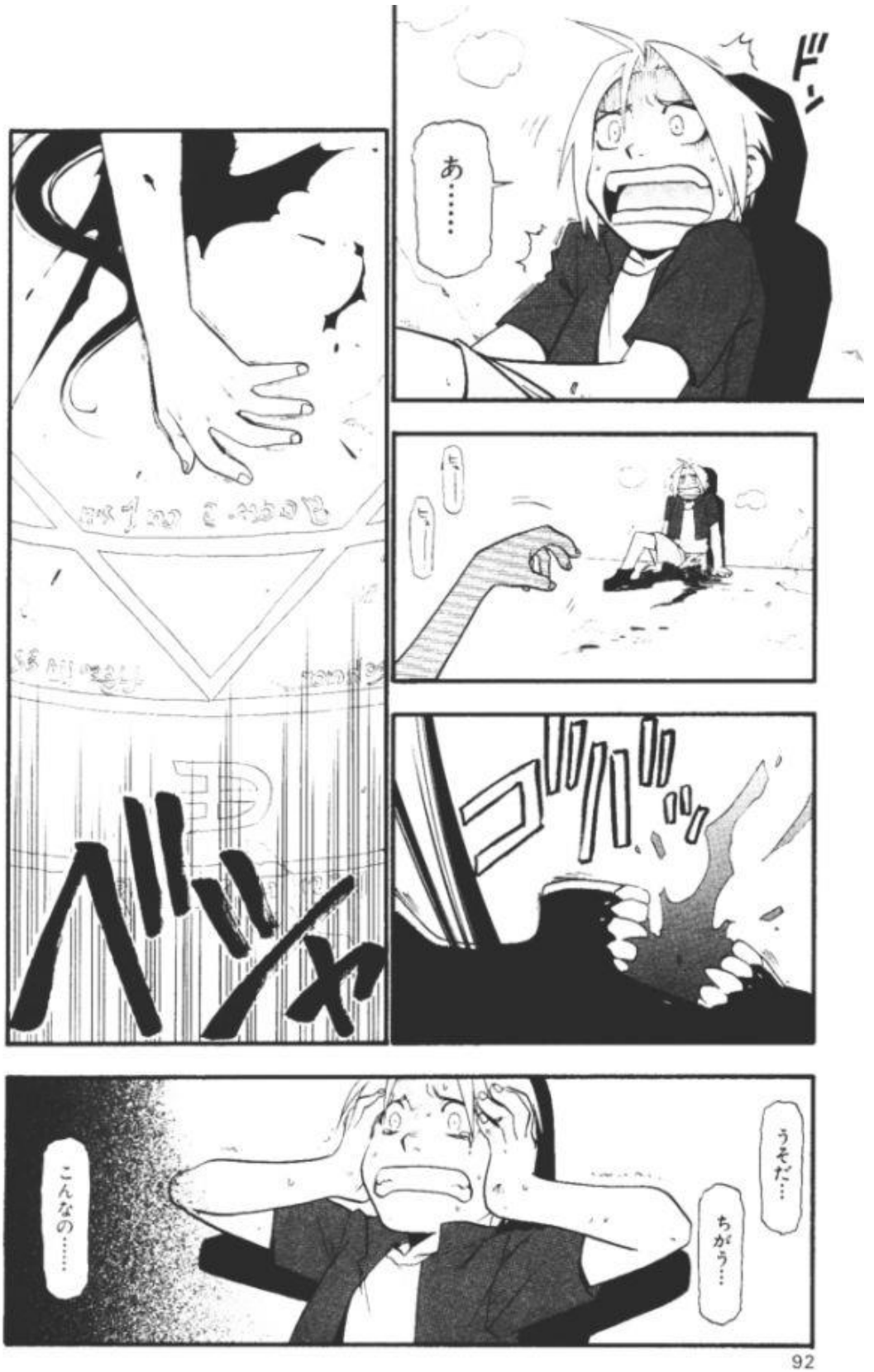

だけど唐突に理解した


そうだ…
オレの人体錬成理論は間違っちゃいなかった
でも足りない……!!
もう少し!!
Gehura Foteil
Netzeth in Primcip
in
もう少し先にオレの求めているものが!
人体錬成の真理があった!
おねがいだ!もう一度見せてくれ!
Netzeth in Primcip
in
もう一度…
ダメだね
これだけの通行料だとここまでしか見せられない
通行料!?


そう
通行料
ハキ
等価交換、だろ？
なぁ
錬金術師
ドクン


あ
あ
あ
あ
あ
…アル！
アル！
アルフォンス!!
くそ！
こんな事が
あって
たまるか！


こんな…
こんなはずじゃ…
ズッ
畜生ォ…
持って行かれた
……!!
助けて…
誰か…
母さん…!!
母……
ヒュー
ヒュー
ヒュー
ゴヒュ



92


う……
かっこは
ごぼぼ
ちがう…
こんなのを望んだんじゃない……
アル…
オレのせいだ
オレの…
ぎりっ
ガシャ
ギリ!!

94


…心臓だろうがくれてやる
だから!!
返せよ!!
たった一人の弟なんだよ!!


バカだな
また来たのか

1st Page

Panel 1. Ed's hand writes down the instructions for the human transmutation.

Panel 2. Checking his scroll Ed exclaims that he has completed all the information for the transmutation.

Panel 3. A crow squawks.

Panel 4. The crow flies over the Elric house while Ed goes over the ingredients of the human body.

Panel 5. Gathering the ingredients, they dispose of them over their table.

2nd Page

Panel 1. The brothers mix and prepare the chemical components for the body.

Panel 2. Al carries a hot pot. Ed asks him to be careful as the content will be part of their mum.

Panel 3. A joyful Al laughs and asks Ed what is the first thing they say to their mum. Ed thinks is obvious.

Panel 4. Both brothers laugh at Ed's comment: "Do not tell our master!"

Panel 5. In a circular container the brothers place the chemical ingredients for an average adult.

Panel 6. They finish writing the transmutation circle.

3rd Page.

Panel 1. Ed cuts his finger with a knife.

Panel 2. A drop of his blood is left to fall.

Panel 3. Both brothers add their blood: "for the soul's information".

Panel 4. The brothers place their hands over the circle and a happy Ed asks Al if they shall go on. Al, smiling, agrees.

Panel 5. The circle is activated with a roar and thunders appear from the centre where the chemicals are.

4th Page.

Panel 1. The thunder continues and the explosions transcend the centre of the circle.

Panel 2. The happy brothers keep a tense smile as they are surrounded by the electric waves around them.

Panel 3. The sound from the transmutation changes to a howl, the waves began to darken. Ed starts to suspect.

Panel 4. Ed finds out something is wrong but stills bewildered.

Panel 5. Al finds out too and tells his brother that something weird is going on.

5th Page.

Panel 1. The dark waves have in their tips little hands that, without touching Al start to make his left arm disappear.

Panel 2. An anxious Ed calls for his brother.

Panel 3. Looking down Ed sees his left leg vanishing.

Panel 4. Crying, Ed shouts what is happening: “It is a rebound!!”

6th Page.

Panel 1. Al is being surrounded by the little dark hands. He extends his other arm to reach Ed as he repeatedly calls for his brother.

Panel 2. Ed extends his right arm to reach Al as he calls his name.

Panel 3. The brothers are almost touching hands although Al's right arm is almost gone.

Panel 4. Al's arm disappears completely leaving Ed's alone.

Panel 5. A light explosion leaves everything in dark.

7th Page.

Panel 1. Ed stands alone in a white empty space. Behinds him an immense floating stone gate with a weird tree graven.

8th Page.

Panel 1. An amazed Ed remains still.

Panel 2. Ed waves his head in bemusement.

Panel 3. The gat stands floating there as Ed asks "What was I doing?"

Panel 4. Ed keeps looking around, calmly asks for his brother.

Panel 5. As he faces the gate a weird voice calls for him with a succinct “Hey”.

9th Page.

Panel 1. An alarmed Ed looks at his left “Who…!!??” The voice answers: “here, here. Right in front of your eyes”.

Panel 2. Ed, alarmed asks “Where…” just a moment before seeing it.

Panel 3. A weird form, the size of a kid, white and contoured by a dark shadow.

Panel 4. Ed, with his back to the gate faces the form and ask “Who…?”. The form looks lively at least and jokingly answers “Oh! Thanks for asking!”

10th Page.

Panel 1. The form answers: “I am what you call “The world”.

Panel 2. Over the top of the gate resound the words of the form: “Also the universe”, “Also god”, “Also truth”.

Panel 3. Over the bottom of the gate the form keeps talking “Also all”, “Also one”.

Panel 4. The form points at Ed: “And finally”.

Panel 5. Reflected on Ed’s iris the form says “I am also you”.

11th Page.

Panel 1. The gate opens with a loud creak. The inside is pitch black, only a big eye and the same dark arms that took Al get out as the form says: “Welcome, idiot who forgot his right place”.

Panel 2. The arms extend grabbing Ed.

Panel 3. Screaming Ed is sucked into the door. The form asks him if it wasn’t what he wanted.

12th Page.

Panel 1. Ed extends his left arm trying to reach the form as he is sucked into the gate.

Panel 2. Screaming the door closes. Only Ed's eye, nose and mouth are visible.

Panel 3. The form sits casually: "I will show you the truth".

Panel 4. The door slams.

13th Page.

Panel 1. Tangled on the dark arms Ed falls into the darkness as he shouts "What is this???!!!

Panel 2. He is sucked in the direction of a white light from where nerves of information extend.

14th Page.

Panel 1. Ed in pain begs it to stop. The arms keep surround him as white stripes start to reach him.

Panel 2. The stripes adopt a double DNA form spiral as he cries "My head is gonna explode!!"

Panel 3. Ed's left leg starts to disappear.

Panel 4. While disappearing, Ed's leg starts to form a white stripe that seems to go opposite of the information reaching his head.

Panel 5. “I don’t want!” cries Ed as his hand contracts in pain.

Panel 6. His eye pupil contracts in pain.

Panel 7. “Please stop!!” as his left forms strips that fade away.

15th Page.

Panel 1. The black arms keep surrounding Ed and dragging him as he keeps asking to stop.

Panel 2. Suddenly Ed looks astonished at something.

Panel 3. In front of him, in the centre of the white stripes opposite to the black arms a white contour appears: it is a young woman.

Panel 5. Ed stretches his right arm calling his mum despite he is even more engulfed by the dark arms.

Panel 6. Ed arms almost touches his mum’s as she calmly tries to reach for him.

16th Page.

Panel 1. Ed is pulled out of the gate, which closes soundly after him. He remains in the same posture as before.

Panel 2. Ed remains astonished and still, in a dynamic position that tries to reach for his mum.

Panel 3. Looking down, Ed sees his arms, entire but empty.

17th Page.

Panel 1. Still backing the gate Ed looks around him.

Panel 2. Behind him the form asks him how it was.

Panel 3. Over the gate Ed words: “it felt like an amazing amount of information was directly transferred to me… My head hurts….”

Panel 4. Looking up to the gate Ed continues “…however I suddenly understood”.

Panel 5. The gate stands immense as Ed shouts “This is…Truth…!!”

18th Page.

Panel 1. Ed legs approaches the gate again. He finds out that their transmutation theory was not wrong… but it was still incomplete.

Panel 2. Ed knocks the gate as he ask for a little more.

Panel 3. Happy and optimistic Ed asks for a bit more time there, what he needs is just ahead of him.

Panel 4. The form stands still as Ed says that there is information for human transmutation.

Panel 5. Ed turns back to the form, he keeps touching the gate as he asking for another chance to see inside. Just another time he repeats. The form denies that.

Panel 6. The form tells Ed that is all he can see for that fee passage. Ed, bewildered asks about the fee passage.

19th Page.

Panel 1. The form advances towards Ed as his leg starts to disappear.

Panel 2. Free passage, affirms as Ed looks down and realizes his left leg has disappeared.

Panel 3. The form smiles looking straight to Ed: “Equivalent exchange, isn’t it?”

Panel 4. An anguished Ed repeats the word.

Panel 5. A light suggests Ed has been transported back.

20th Page.

Panel 1. Ed lies in the floor screaming in pain as both his hands try to block the injure of his lost leg.

Panel 2. Al's clothes remain lying around the floor. Ed calls for his brother as he cannot believe what is happening.

21st Page.

Panel 1. Ed manages to crawl as his leg keeps bleeding. "This can't be happening…" he repeats "This beast… Al was taken away…!!"

Panel 2. Ed keeps crying "Someone… please help…" "Mum…!!"

Panel 3. Lying on the floor Ed looks up "mum…" and a woman's arm appears.

Panel 4. In the middle of the transmutation circle a weird black feminine monstrous looks into Ed.

Panel 5. The form's face expels smoke from its open mouth. The eyes, circular and white lack pupils or iris do not seem human.

22nd Page.

Panel 1. Ed’s backs down in anguish.

Panel 2. Ed keeps looking at the feminine form whose left arm is the only limb resembling a human body.

Panel 3. The being starts to throw up blood.

Panel 4. The left arm of the being tries to reach out of the circle.

Panel 5. Ed presses his hands against his head as he repeats: “It can’t be… is not true… this”.

23rd Page.

Panel 1. Ed takes his hand to his mouth.

Panel 2. The armours of his father remain still as sound of Ed throwing up resonate across the room.

Panel 3. Ed bends over his vomit, as he keeps refusing to believe what has happened.

Panel 4. Ed, in pain, calls for his brother as he blames himself.

Panel 5. Ed’s right hand contracts in pain and anger.

Panel 6. He bandages his wound in determination.

Panel 7. One of the vintages armours falls separating from the helmet.

24th Page.

Panel 1. Ed crawls to the armour.

Panel 2. He draws a transmutation circle inside of the armour with his own blood.

Panel 3. Clenching his teeth Ed asks for his little brother to be returned.

Panel 4. He still bleeding abundantly but he will give his leg or both of this hands.

Panel 5. Ed stares at his bloody hands.

25th Page.

Panel 1. Tired Ed would give his “guts” to get his brother back.

Panel 2. One of Al boots remains in solitude… Ed shouts: “Therefore!!”

Panel 3. With all his strength Ed shouts to get his brother returned: “He is m only little brother!!”

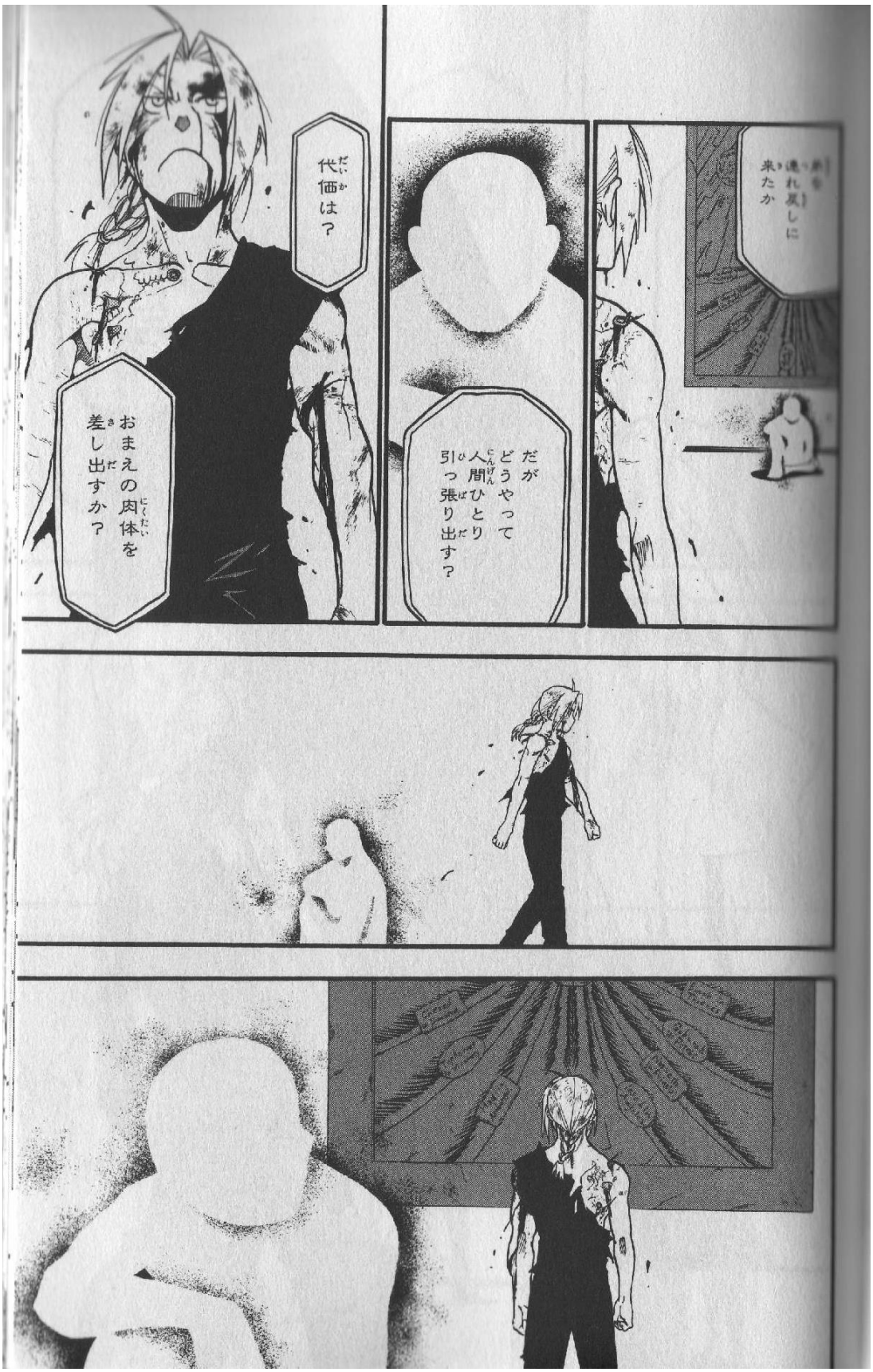
Panel 4. He claps his hands activating a transmutation.

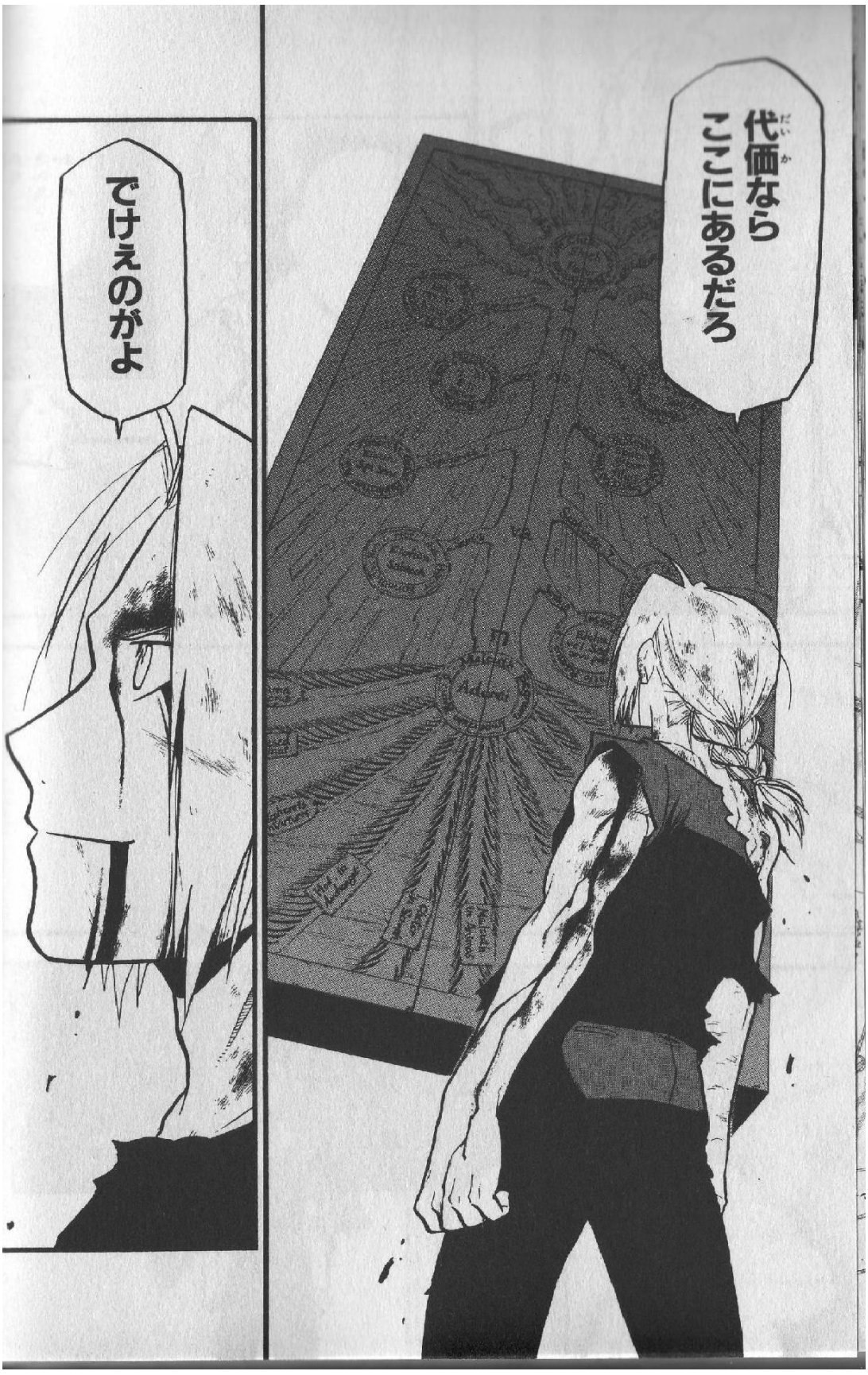
26th Page.

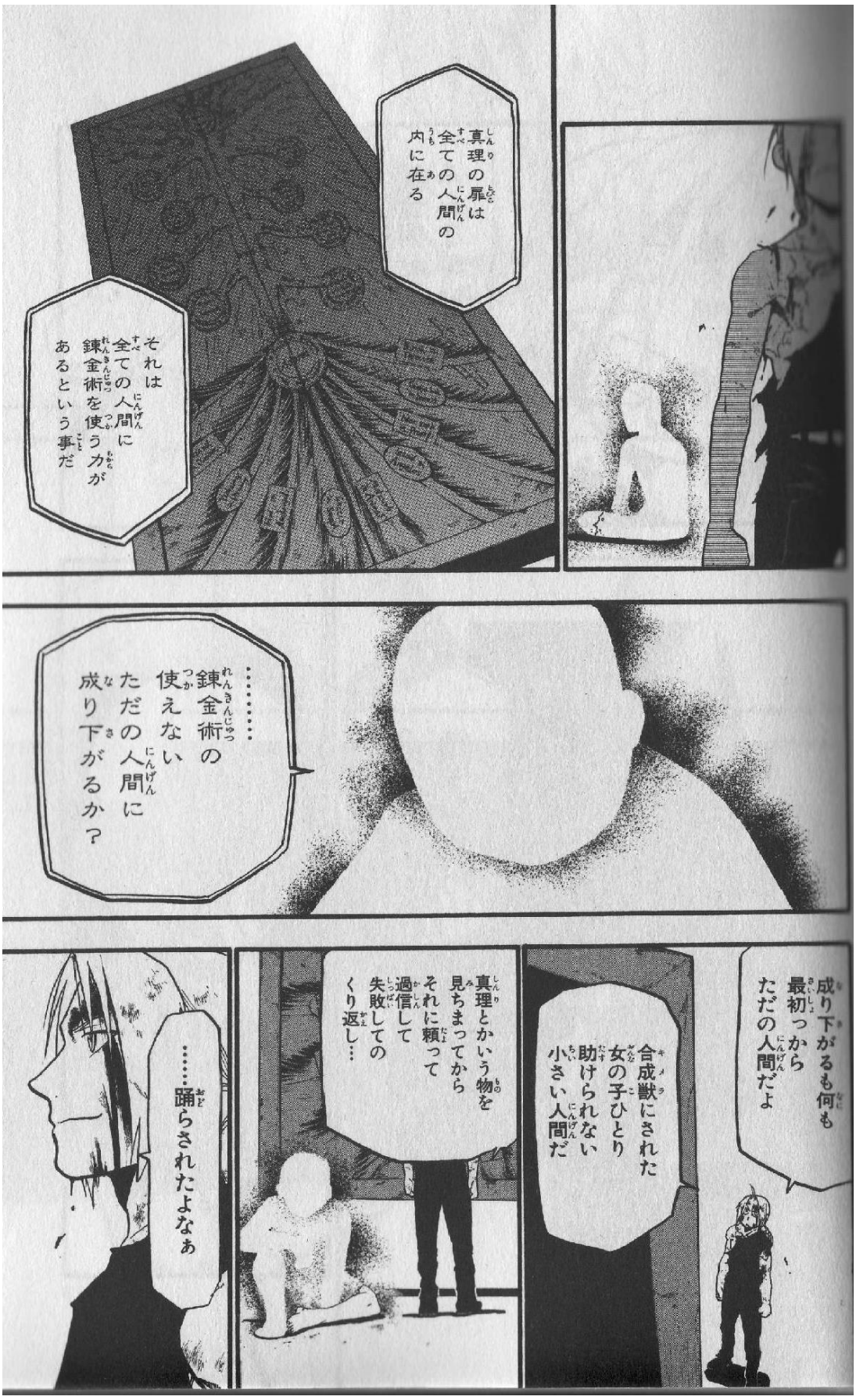
Panel 1. The transmutation is being felt in the other side. The form remains there.

Panel 2. The form looks at his right arm, being formed with Ed's. "Stupid" he says. "Here he comes again".

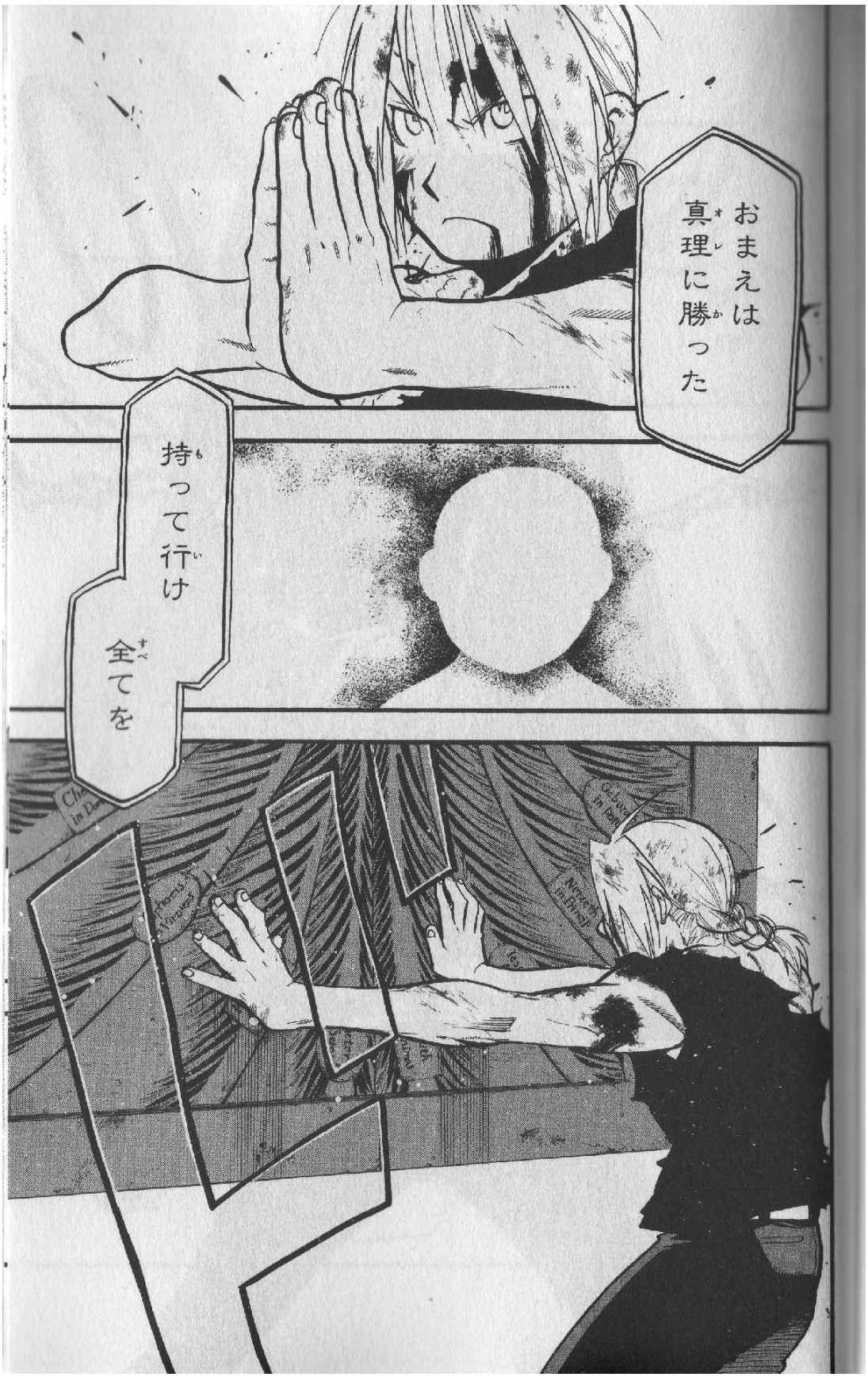
Third Scene:

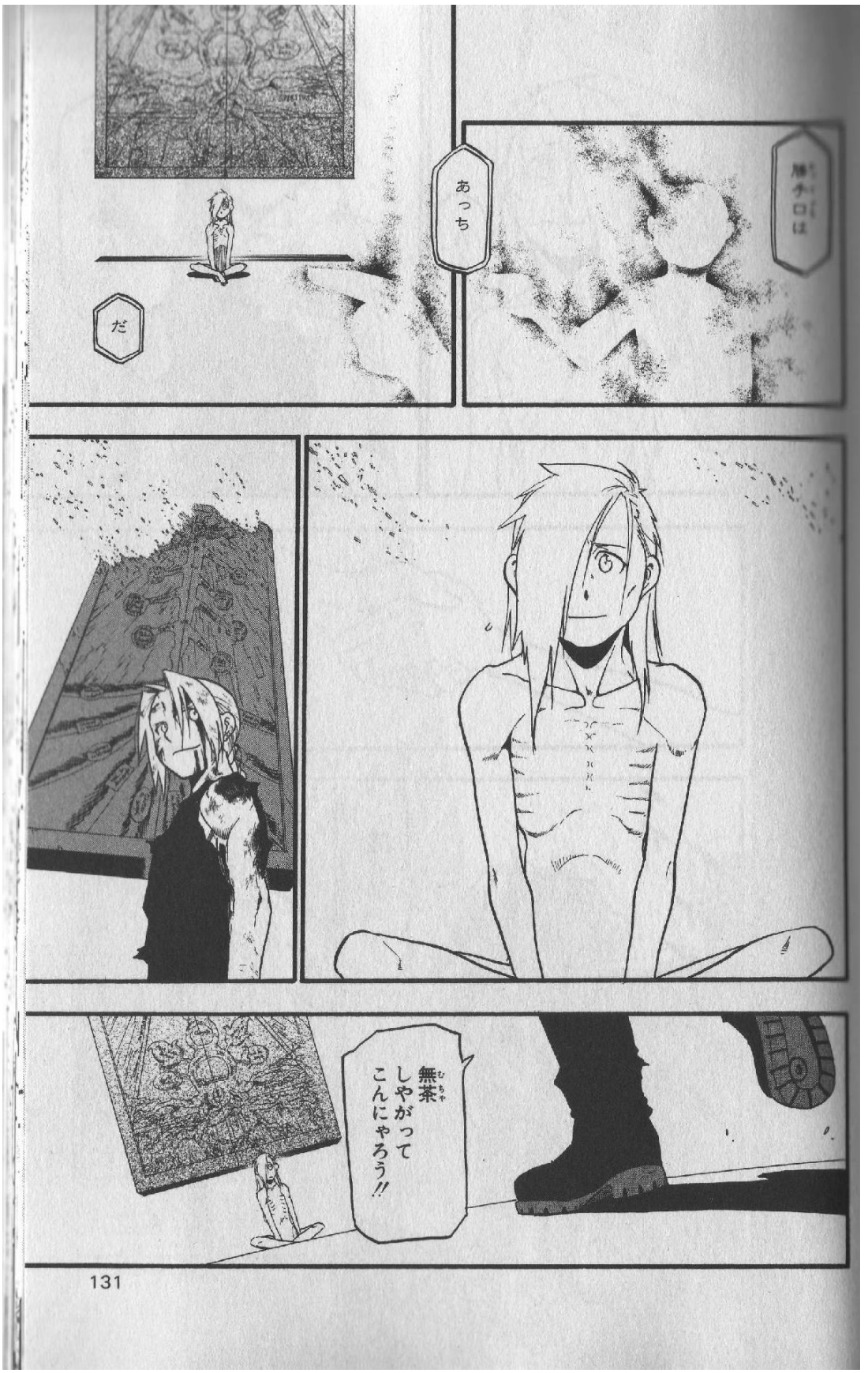

【弟】
連れ戻しに
来たか
だが
どうやって
人間ひとり
引っ張り出す？
代価は？
おまえの肉体を
差し出すか？


代価(だいか)なら
ここにあるだろ
でけぇのがよ


真理の扉は
全ての人間の
内に在る
それは
全ての人間に
錬金術を使う力が
あるという事だ
……錬金術の
使えない
ただの人間に
成り下がるか？
成り下がるも何も
最初っから
ただの人間だよ
合成獣にされた
女の子ひとり
助けられない
小さい人間だ
真理とかいう物を
見ちまってから
それに頼って
過信して
失敗しての
くり返し…
……踊らされたよなぁ


……もう
これが無くても
大丈夫か？
錬金術が無くても
みんながいるさ
にっ
正解だ
錬金術師
128


おまえは
真理に勝った
持って行け
全てを


勝チロは
あっち
だ
無茶
しやがって
こんにゃろう!!


迎えに来たぞ
アル
うん
一緒に帰ろう

1st Page.

Panel 1. Ed, situated in the centre of a human transmutation circle activates it using both of his hands.

Panel 2. A white light symbolizing Ed's transportation from one plane to the other

Panel 3. Ed is transported to the liminality. The Gate, in front Truth sitting as always and in front of him Ed.

2nd Page.

Panel 1. Ed is facing Truth and the Gate. Truth asks him if he has come for his brother.

Panel 2. Truth continues to interrogate Ed: "how would you pull a whole human out?"

Panel 3. Ed, covered in blood looks resolute. Truth keeps asking what fee would he pay, if it is his whole physical body.

Panel 4. Ed, in silence passes Truth, now quiet too.

Panel 5. Ed stands in front of the Gate. Truth turn his head back looking at him.

3rd Page.

Panel 1. Ed stands in front of the Gate, looking at it he answers: here is the payment.

Panel 2. Ed, smiling says: this big thing.

4th Page.

Panel 1. Ed stands serious, Truth remains immobile.

Panel 2. The Gate stands floating as Truth talks about it. The Gate, he says, exists inside every human, and it is thanks to it that they can use alchemy.

Panel 3. Truth continues: without alchemic abilities you would be degraded to a regular human

Panel 4. Ed looks at the Gate, which is seen from behind. He answers: “I have been a simple human since the beginning”…”I was not able to help a little girl turned into a chimera, I am a little person”.

Panel 5. Truth is sitting next to Ed, but looking against the Gate. Ed continues: “Since I’ve seen the Truth I have relied to much on it, that made me fail…”

Panel 6. Smiling, Ed concludes: “It manipulated me…”

5th Page.

Panel 1. Truth asks Ed: “… but would you be fine without it?”

Panel 2. Ed turns back with a wide smile: “Although I won’t have alchemy I still have everyone”.

Panel 3. Truth shows a wide smile too.

Panel 4. Ed is showed from his rear standing in front of the Gate. Truth responds: “That is right, Alchemist.

6th Page.

Panel 1. Ed, serious now join both his hands together. Truth continues: “You have won against truth”.

Panel 2. Truth faceless head says: “Take it all”.

Panel 3. Ed places both of his hands on the Gate with a great sound.

7th Page.

1st Panel. Ed activates a transmutation over the Gate which sends lightings around him.

8th Page.

1st Panel. Truth starts to vanished. But pointing with his hand he tells Ed that the back door is…”

2nd Panel. Truth’s hand points at Al’s famished body, in front of another Gate, with a different mosaic “over there” finishes Truth.

3rd Panel. Al sits with his scrawny body, but smiling at Ed.

4th Panel. Ed looks in Al's direction as his Gate starts to dissolve from the top.

5th Panel. Ed advances towards Al who sits with his eyes wi open as Ed says to him: "You stupid …!"

9th Page.

1st Panel. Ed extends his recently recovered arm to Al. Smiling he tells him he has come to pick him up.

2nd Panel. Al looks up rising his arm. "Yes", he answers.

3rd Panel. Both brother's hands reach each other.

4th Panel. Ed and Al hold hands as the Gate slowly starts to open squeaking.

5th Panel. Ed helps Al to stand up and walk. They are both illuminated. Al looks astonished and Ed, smiling says: "let's go back together".

10th Page.

1st Panel. Ed and Al, together contemplate how the Gate opens revealing a bright white light. Ed says: "Everyone is waiting".